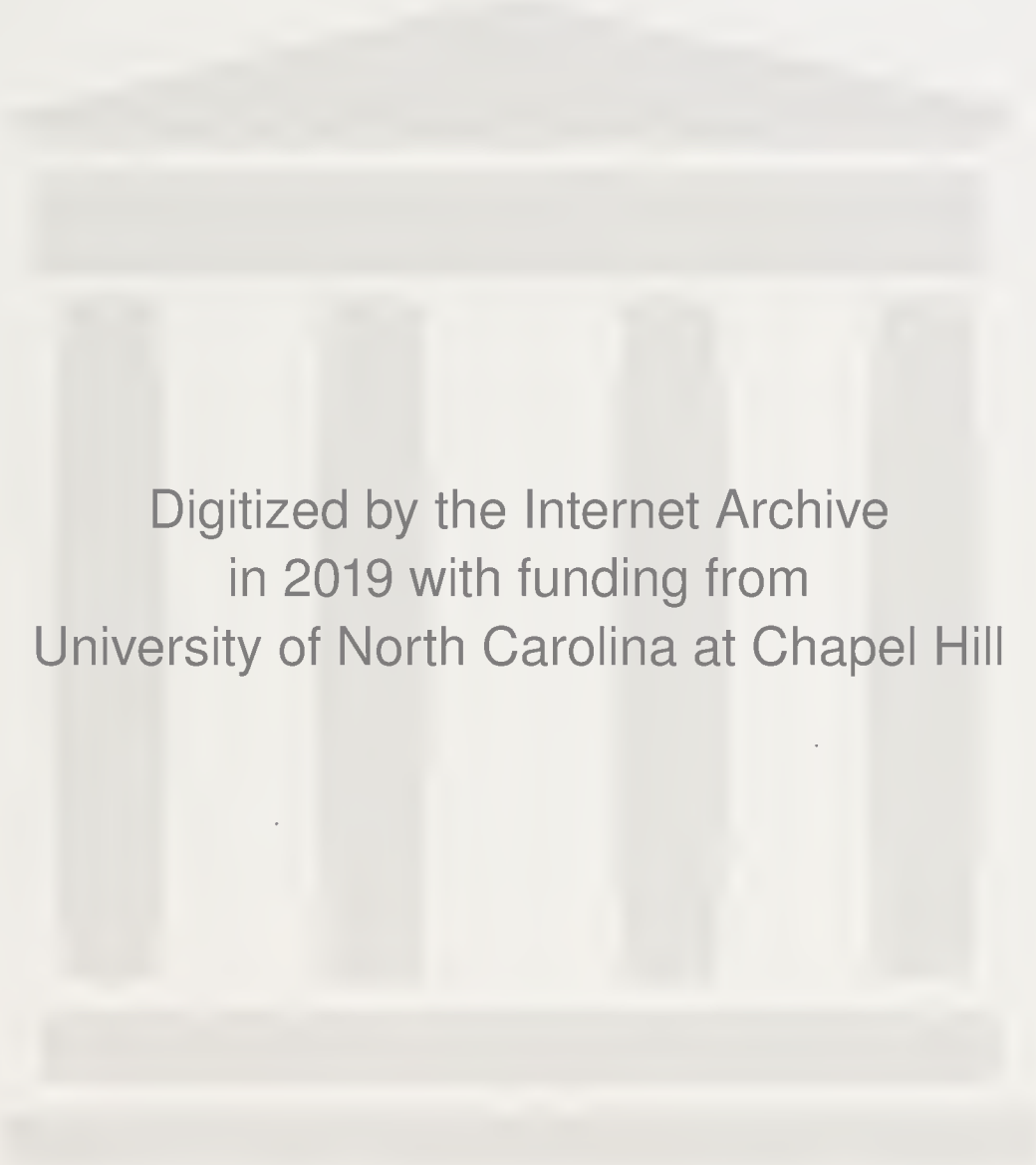


CAPTAIN CASTLE

CARLTON DAWE

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“SAVE ME! SAVE ME!”

CAPTAIN CASTLE

A TALE OF
THE CHINA SEAS

BY

CARLTON DAWE

AUTHOR OF "YELLOW AND WHITE," "MOUNT DESOLATION,"
"KAKEMONOS," ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

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CAPTAIN CASTLE

CHAPTER I

I JOIN THE "COREA"

I WENT out to China in one of the smartest boats of the well-known Red Funnel Line, but an attack of fever—caught, I believe, during a night ashore at Singapore—necessitated my being conveyed to the hospital as soon as we arrived in Hong-Kong. There I lay for some time in an extremely precarious condition, knowing nothing of what was going on about me, and caring less. When, however, I had recovered sufficient energy to think at all, the whereabouts of my ship was naturally uppermost in my mind. I wanted to know if she had yet returned from Shanghai—that port being her outward

destination. The doctor smiled as I put the question.

"I should say she has left Penang by this."

"Left Penang?" said I.

"My dear fellow," he replied, "you have been lying here practically unconscious for the last six weeks. Your ship sailed on her homeward voyage some eight days ago."

"Six weeks!" I murmured. It had all been a blank to me, though I had a dim recollection of seeing strange faces at intervals, of hearing strange voices.

"They came to see me, of course?"

It was, perhaps, a childish question, but I felt weak and lonely, and home seemed such a long way off.

"Yes, all the officers came in turns, and the captain called every day. He left word that you were to wait for nothing, and that if you recovered—for I must tell you there was some doubt of it at the time—you were not to bother about a ship, but wait for him."

I think I must have blubbered a bit at this, for the doctor, wiping my eyes with his own handkerchief, spoke to me as though he did not approve of such feeble exhibitions, though

even his sharpest reproofs had a pleasant ring of kindness in them. Mine, apparently, had been but an ordinary case. It was not till after that I learned how much he had done for me.

But it was weeks before I was able to get about, and when I was at length discharged from the hospital, the doctor stood by me, and gave me a room in his own bungalow, nor would he hear of me looking out for a ship. I was to wait patiently till my own returned, and then if I was well enough he would be only too glad to see the back of me. Truth to tell, I was doubly indebted to his extreme kindness; for had I gone to sea in my then enfeebled condition, it is probable that I would not have survived a three weeks' voyage. As it was, thanks to his generosity and unceasing attention, I made rapid strides towards recovery. For being young, and of powerful physique, once I had fairly got the upper hand of my weakness I gave it no quarter. The bout had been a long one, and I was in no mood for trifling.

But just then, while I was beginning to entertain hopes of soon joining my old

captain, one of the Red Funnel boats came in with the news that my ship would probably not be out for another three months, as she had gone north to the Clyde to be re-engined. This, of course, at once decided me to look out for a new berth, as it was against both my wish and inclination, now that I had entirely recovered, any further to impose on the hospitality of my friend.

All my papers being in good order, and the cause of my leaving the Red Funnel boat duly certified, the shipping-master informed me that he did not think I would have much difficulty in getting a berth. True, the Red Funnel Line would have sent me home, or I might, if I waited, get on another boat of the company; but I preferred to do a little independent cruising on my own account. After all, the fellows on the regular liners see very little of the country, if one may so speak. To go backwards and forwards between the same ports is like going from station to station on a railway, or crossing the Alps through a tunnel.

Four mornings in succession I called at the shipping office, but without any favourable

result. Yet on the fifth, as I entered, the shipping-master called me to him and asked how I would like a run down to Java. I answered with a smile that I would like anything that came along. He nodded, and went on with his writing. I stood back and waited.

Presently a man in white ducks, white shoes, and a big cork helmet, walked quietly into the office. As he entered he cast a quick, comprehensive glance round the room, and for a moment or two his keen eye rested on me. He was a middle-aged man of medium height, with a thin sallow face, which looked as though it had weathered many a fierce gale, fair hair, and a long yellow moustache, in which was a fair sprinkling of grey. A fine-looking man, notwithstanding his heavy underlip ; his eyes were blue and keen, but on the whole not unpleasant.

Noiselessly he stepped across to the shipping-master and shook hands in a lackadaisical sort of way, as though the operation were a most fatiguing ordeal.

"Morning to you."

Apparently this salutation cost him a considerable effort.

"Morning," grinned the shipping-master, who was as agile as the new-comer was slow.

"Have you forgotten what we spoke about last night?"

"No, captain."

"I thought, perhaps——" and he smiled pensively as at some agreeable recollection.

The shipping-master giggled like a girl, and then looked at me.

"Will you step this way, Mr. Quenton?"

I immediately approached his desk and stood on the left-hand side: the captain was on the right.

"Let me introduce you to Captain Castle," he said. "Captain, this is Mr. Quenton, the man I have fixed upon for your second officer."

The captain eyed me coolly, and at close quarters I saw that his eyes were of a very pale blue and singularly penetrating. He stroked his big moustache affectionately, and was polite enough to drawl out that he was pleased to meet me.

"I have told Captain Castle all about you," said the shipping-master, "and I think we

may consider this little affair settled, eh, captain?"

The captain was still busy tenderly stroking his moustache: then he fixed his necktie and patiently scrutinised the set of his pants. This done, he carefully fondled his moustache again, and replied in his effeminate drawl that he thought so, but that he would leave everything in the hands of the shipping-master.

"And when shall I go aboard, sir?" I asked.

"The deuce take it!" said he, as though the suggestion were sprung on him. "I think you had better go aboard at once."

"Very well, sir."

Off I went, marvelling much at the style of Captain Castle, who looked more like a swaggering major from the barracks than the master of a tramp. As a rule, the sea dandy is a very dreadful person, a person who assumes sundry exalted airs without possessing the true air of consequence, who outwardly despises the graces of the landman, yet inwardly cultivates them, with a result incongruous in the extreme. Certainly

Captain Castle seemed a remarkably quiet man, and in a way a gentleman, which was the more astounding considering he but commanded a China coaster. I could imagine him on the deck of a big mail boat surrounded by crowds of admiring lady passengers. What a handsome hero they would have thought him, and wouldn't he have played the game for all it was worth !

That afternoon, taking my belongings with me, I hired a sampan and put off to the ship. She was an iron screw-steamer, of about eighteen hundred tons gross, and was called the *Corea*. Built entirely for the coasting trade, she was in no essential a thing of beauty. Indeed, when I first set my foot on her deck amidships, which was tarred to hide the disgraceful condition of the planks, I felt a sudden, ominous twinge shoot through me. Her funnel was low, black and dirty, with here and there great cracks where the tar had peeled off ; while her two short stumps of masts were begrimed with soot. A most forbidding object I thought her, but undoubtedly a sturdy craft, as her build showed and her record proved. However,

I was in for it now. She was to be my home for the next six weeks or so, and I had not been reared so luxuriously that I could not sleep unless on a bed of down.

As I stood with my trunk on the deck and looked about me, I noticed a burly, ginger-bearded fellow forward, who was shaking his fist and shouting furiously at some Chinese sailors, whose method of working did not meet with his approval. He pulled the peak of his cap down over his eyes, he jammed his great hands into his pockets and spat derisively. Then in unqualified terms he called upon the mothers to witness the stupidity of their sons, and having duly exhausted a somewhat comprehensive vocabulary, he turned his great back on them in disgust. This brought me into his immediate line of vision, and after staring at me for a second or two he came aft.

A closer inspection of him was not conducive to unqualified adoration. I thought him more like an orang-outang than a man. His face, or what you could see of it for his thick beard, was burnt to a vivid red, and shone luridly with grease and perspiration. His attire consisted of a pair of greasy brown

trousers, a singlet that had been unduly withheld from the wash-tub, a pair of sloppy shoes, and no socks.

"Hullo," he cried, "who the deuce are you?"

I was not enamoured of his style, but I replied as civilly as I could, "My name is Quenton. I have come aboard as second officer."

He looked me up and down in a critical, quizzing fashion, cocking his head on one side just as a monkey will before it cracks a nut. Somehow I didn't feel on roses. For all I knew to the contrary, the baboon might take me for a nut. As his eyes reached my collar and tie, a grim smile flitted over his whiskers. I began to wonder if there were any means of escape handy.

"Oh," he said, "you've come aboard as second *officer*, have you? Sorry, but we don't have *officers* aboard this boat."

I looked my wonder: he grinned consumedly.

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you."

"Don't you?" He laughed contemptuously. "Officers are for mail boats. We are only a tramp and have *mates*."

I smiled affably, thinking that the best way to soothe the monster. When one goes to pat the head of a strange dog, one instinctively calls him "Good boy." So with a good-natured grin I metaphorically patted the head of this brute.

"Very well, then, I have come as second mate. Can you tell me if the chief is aboard?"

"I can."

"Is he?"

"He is."

"Where is he?"

"At your service," and the monster bowed.

"You! You are the chief officer?"

"I am the chief *mate*," and he grinned again.

"Yes," I said, in a reflective, musing sort of way, "there is a difference between a mate and an officer." I don't think he liked the way I looked him up and down.

"There is also a difference between a first and a second mate," he replied, and slopped off in his clattering shoes.

This was not an auspicious beginning, and had I possessed much wisdom I would have

acted more diplomatically ; but somehow the fellow's style got on my nerves, and I grew desperate.

Later on, when I came up from below and reported myself as ready for duty, the mate looked me up and down in his leering, impertinent way, and said, "My stars, we are coming out on the old *Corea*. Talk about a mail boat. Scissors !"

I knew the brute was referring to my collar and tie, the like of which his red neck had not known for many a long day ; but I smiled good-humouredly, determined not to be provoked into a hostile attitude. Though never reckoned much of a wit, I had an idea that chaff would be the safest outlet for my feelings, and perhaps the most acceptable to my chief.

"I heard that she was rather a smart boat," I replied, assuming a look of intense gravity ; "that's why I was so anxious to join her. Dress coats for dinner, isn't it ?"

His little eyes wrinkled up in a grin ; his heavy eyebrows came down over them like a ragged hedge. He certainly was a most extraordinary monster.

"Only on Sundays—after prayers. Then we put on our patent leathers."

"With socks?"

He didn't like this. It was getting personal. A bad look swept out of his little eyes; but he laughed in a hard, dry fashion, as he said, "I see. You're a bit of a smarty. We shall get on well together."

About six that evening we all took tea together in the saloon, and here I met for the first time the three engineers, they, with the captain, the mate, the third and myself, being the only Europeans on board. All the others, sailors, firemen, &c., were Chinese.

The engineers, it is perhaps scarcely necessary to say, were Scots. The chief was a pale-faced little fellow called Campbell, with watery blue eyes of a shifty, uncertain gaze, and a broad intelligent brow. The second was a huge fellow of twenty-six called Craigiemore, as different in every particular from his chief as a man could be. The third was a nondescript sort of fellow with a mouthful of bad teeth.

Craigiemore and I seemed to hit it off at once. His fearless eye, his open brow, his

well-built frame, were points no ordinary observer could easily pass. I know I admired him immensely. He came and sat beside me at tea, and generally made himself agreeable ; and it was all done in such an awkward, kind, shy sort of way, as to make me doubly cherish his civility.

After tea was over we went up on deck and smoked a pipe together, and during a long conversation he told me most of the things I wished to know concerning the *Corea*. As a rule, the English he spoke was excellent, though when he grew excited, or emphatic, he came out with words that would charm a chronicler of the kailyard. But being a Scotsman he knew just how much to say ; and though I was sure he could have told me a good deal about Captain Castle, he would never go beyond the statement that the captain was a “verra good man—a verrra good man indeed.” I could not help admiring his caution, though I knew how unnecessary it was.

Of my friend, the mate, whose name was Minton, he would say nothing one way or the other. He admitted that the chief

engineer and Minton got on well together : also the captain and his chief officer. Indeed, from what I could gather, the *Corea* was a sort of floating mutual admiration society.

A little later on the captain came aboard, but only to change his light suit for a darker one. Before going off again he called the mate aside to give him an order, and I could not help noticing the obsequious manner of the man ; though truth to confess, the captain did seem a being of another world. As he passed me I saluted, but he merely gave me a curt little nod. It was evident that there was only one master on the *Corea* when Captain Castle was aboard.

CHAPTER II

STEERING SOUTHWARDS

EARLY the next morning some carpenters came off from the shore, and immediately proceeded to demolish the bulkhead next the captain's cabin, thus knocking two cabins into one ; and though at first we wondered at the reason of this enlargement, it soon leaked out that our gallant captain was about to marry, and that his bride was to accompany him on the voyage. This news caused considerable commotion on board. No one had suspected such a thing, though Captain Castle, true to the traditions of his profession, had ever been a warm admirer of the gentle sex. Our gorilla of a mate grinned consumedly whenever he spoke of it ; the chief engineer looked serious ; Craigiemore confessed that it was "verra curious." I couldn't see it myself. Was marriage such a singular thing to these

Bohemians of the waves? What was more natural than that the captain should take his bride with him? He was a lucky fellow. Had he been in the Red Funnel Line he would not have been allowed such a luxury.

But in the meantime the carpenters went on with their work, and when they had finished, some upholsterers and decorators came off and transformed the huge cabin into a charming bed-sitting-room. Then a couple of days before we sailed the captain brought his bride-elect off to inspect the ship, and whatever she may have thought of us above deck, she could not have thought ill of the nest he had rigged up for her below. I saw her as she came up after her inspection, and a stylish, fine-figured woman she seemed; but as she wore a thick grey gossamer over her face, my imagination had to supply the cut of her features.

We hadn't much in the way of cargo: a miscellaneous collection of odds and ends, with enough coal to last us the round trip. There were no passengers aft, and only about a dozen coolies forward. We were to load with sugar at Java, and from what I could

make out the fellows on board agreed that the charter was a good one. Whether they knew for certain, or merely guessed, I did not know, nor was I curious enough to inquire. Personally I was glad of the change. I had never been to Java or through the Java Sea, and I looked forward with pleasurable anticipations to getting out of the beaten track.

At last the day of sailing arrived. The blue-peter went up at the fore, our gorgeous house-flag at the mizzen. I have invariably noticed that the more insignificant the company, the greater its show of house-flag, badge, and band; nor were we in the least exceptional.

But in the meantime the usual hurry-scurry and bustle of preparing for sea went on. The mate, in a clean singlet, looked important as he drove the loiterers down the gangway into their sampans; while our Chinese bo'sun, Ji Ji, swore at his compatriots in his very best style. Then, about half-past eight, a launch from the Hong-Kong and Shanghai Bank came off with some \$80,000 in silver, which the mate and I saw carefully

stowed away in one of the after-cabins. This done, we were ready to up anchor ; but as yet neither the captain nor his lady had put in an appearance. We smiled, of course ; but when we recollected that the marriage had taken place only the day before, we had no inclination to be severe.

However, about half-past ten, we saw a launch making rapidly towards us, the forward part of which was heaped up with trunks and packing-cases. Presently, away aft, we discovered a man and a woman, and in a few minutes the captain and his wife were aboard. Our worthy mate smiled affably as he saw the trunks, bandboxes, and packing-cases come up the gangway, though that smile had something of lofty condescension about it. After all, it was pretty woman's pretty way. No doubt the mate was a man in feeling, though a satyr in appearance.

The skipper looked extremely affable. He shook hands with Minton, and was good enough to greet me with a pleasant nod. He asked if everything was ready, and receiving a reply in the affirmative, escorted his bride below. In about half-an-hour's time he re-

appeared, having donned a brass-bound reefer jacket and a gorgeously-braided cap. Arrayed thus he sauntered forward, the lady accompanying him. I was on the bridge as they came up, but as she still wore her veil I had not much chance of getting a good peep at her features.

Once the captain trod the bridge he seemed to increase in size and in importance. He was as different from the lackadaisical dandy of my early acquaintance as a man could well be. His slow, drawling voice gave way to sharp, stern tones of command. It was, "Now then, put her hard over," and "Are you ready there, forward?" There was no mistake about the tone either.

"Ay, ay, sir," yelled the mate.

"Then haul away."

Rattle, rattle went the winch, and the great cable rolled up rapidly link on link. Then came the mate's voice—

"All clear, sir."

"Slow ahead," cried the captain.

I, who was standing by the telegraph, signalled accordingly: the gong clattered, an answering clatter came from below. A

moment of suspense followed: there was a low thud from the engines, and the ship began slowly to forge ahead.

Carefully we threaded our way through the shipping, the old man yelling out the orders in his firm, commanding tones; and whenever he said port, starboard, or steady, his bride turned upon him and positively beamed through her veil. Certainly he was, in her estimation, the most wonderful man that ever trod a bridge. It was really so very clever of him to say starboard or steady, just when starboard or steady was the right thing. I envied him such intense worship. I almost fancied I was smart enough to gain it myself. When we finally cleared the channel she squeezed his arm, and said he was a clever old dear. He patted her hand and called her his love, or something equally nice. It was most affecting.

But she had yet a lot to see, and having exhaustively scrutinised the compass she turned to scrutinise me. Not that I was much, but I suppose she regarded me as an instrument for working the ship, and as such a sort of curiosity. I was standing by the

engine-room telegraph : the captain was over in the port corner of the bridge. She came quite close to me and looked me straight in the eyes, and though her veil was fairly thick, I saw that she had a startling pair of lamps and an extremely well-cut face.

“What is that thing?” she said, pointing to the telegraph. Her voice, if somewhat sharp, was of a very fine quality, and had a curious little foreign accent, Portuguese or Spanish, I could not quite make out ; but I was not surprised when I heard afterwards that she had lived many years in Manilla.

I was explaining to her the uses of the instrument, when the old man happened to overhear me. A sudden scowl darkened his yellow face ; but when he saw her and guessed who was the real culprit, he tried to smooth away the frown, and succeeded wretchedly. He came over, and in half-a-dozen sharp words explained the use of the instrument. Then as he led her away, I heard him mutter, “My dear girl, I think I ought to tell you that I never permit any one to speak to my officers on duty.” This was said so that I could hear it. She tossed her head and laughed, and

added something that I couldn't catch ; but whatever it was it didn't seem to please him overmuch.

On ordinary occasions the *Corea* could steam her nine or ten knots ; but a somewhat lengthy spell in the harbour of Hong-Kong had given the barnacles an admirable opportunity to accumulate, of which they took such advantage that our present rate of progression was not expected to exceed six or seven. However, that should be of little consequence to a fellow who is paid by the month ; though it is really astonishing how eager a sailor always is to drop anchor. Nevertheless, a fortnight or thereabouts seemed rather a long time in which to make Batavia.

For the first three or four days things went along quite as well as I expected. The weather was gloriously fine, the sea smooth. We had safely passed the Macclesfield Bank, and were well on our way down the China Sea. Everything worked smoothly, from the engines to the captain. Sometimes his wife accosted me as I passed aft, and occasionally she made her way to the bridge during my watch ; but her husband finding her there one day, called her

down to[him, and she seemed rather afraid to look at me after that.

I was a little annoyed, and not a little sorry. It seemed unreasonably boorish that he should forbid her to speak to me, for by no possible stretch of the imagination could I believe him to be jealous so soon. To say the least of it, I thought it extremely inconsiderate of him. I also feared that she had already found marital bliss a little disconcerting. Hour after hour she sat under the awning aft, a book in her lap, her eyes fixed dreamily on the sea. I could see her quite plainly as I walked up and down the bridge, and I used to try to fathom her thoughts. Sometimes she appeared to look absolutely wretched. Her face was pale, and when in repose singularly careworn. Taking her thus at such a disadvantage I built fancy upon fancy, and a foolish edifice constructed. And yet it was curious how her face changed when she wished to please. Then it lit up grandly : her great dark eyes shone till she seemed all eyes. But it was a sad face all the same, and I caught myself thinking about it much more than was good for me.

That Captain Castle was the proper mate for such a woman I already began to doubt, which doubt, though the result of much observation, consisted of mere surmise. After the first day out he left her pretty much to herself, sleeping below while she wandered aimlessly about the decks, or sat under the awning reading. In the course of time I mentioned my doubt to Craigiemore, but that cautious Scot merely shook his head mysteriously.

“My dear man, be thankful for sma’ mercies.”

“You’re a mysterious beggar, Craigiemore.”

“Ay,” he said. “Do ye ken that wisdom was never born wi’ a lang tongue?”

“My dear fellow, I grant you the wisdom. I am even aware that that admirable lady was born in Scotland.”

“Ay,” he cut in, “every Scot kens that.”

“Granted; but why should this particular Scot refuse to gratify a most commendable craving after knowledge?”

He took a glance round before speaking. Then he said, “My dear man, Captain Castle is a verra curious individual, and if you kenned him as well as I do, you’d thank your stars

that he has brought his wife wi' him this voyage. Look ye, I think we'll see him at his best."

"Really ! But honestly, Craigiemore, aren't you trying to make a fool of me ?"

"May the deil slap me if I am."

"Then in what way is Captain Castle so verra curious ? I can't say that I have found him so extremely different from other men."

"Indeed I hope ye will na," was all he said.

Here the captain appeared out of the deck-house aft, and after taking a few hurried turns up and down beckoned to me.

As I advanced he stood bolt upright, and looked me up and down somewhat contemptuously. His face was flushed, his eye singularly forbidding. He had the look of a man who has suddenly been wakened from sleep, and who is surly in consequence.

Watching me for a moment or two as I stood before him, he said abruptly, "I think it's your watch below ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why don't you keep it there ?"

I looked my surprise : his face darkened.

The transition was as sudden as it was unexpected.

“Why don’t you keep it there?” he repeated harshly. “I don’t like to see my officers loafing about the decks.”

“It was very hot below. I came up to smoke a pipe.”

“And gossip with that canting Scotchman!”

“Sir!”

“Oh, I know your style,” he blurted out angrily; “you’re all alike. But I tell you it won’t do for me. Why don’t you smoke your pipe below?”

“Why should I?”

“Why should you!” he shouted, his yellow face flushing a deep crimson. “Because I wish it; that’s why you should, and what I wish is law aboard this packet.”

Though usually considered an amiable sort of fellow, one who has no wish but to pursue his way in peace, I fairly trembled with rage. A hot retort sprang to my tongue, but I shut it in, for which piece of self-restraint I duly patted my own shoulder. Then I turned to go.

“Look here, you—Mr.——” he blurted out.

“Quenton, sir.”

“Quenton, or whatever you call yourself, I want you to remember that I am the captain of this ship.”

“Very well, sir.”

“And that I’ll have no philandering round with the engineers. I know your sort: now you know me.”

I thought it extremely hard to be black-guarded in this way, and for no apparent reason; but it was harder to keep my mouth shut, my hands to my sides. Though his subordinate, I was not a dog. I said I was sorry if I had done anything of which he did not approve, but as yet I was utterly ignorant of his idiosyncrasies.

“You’ll soon know them,” he said, with a harsh laugh. “I’ve had sea-lawyers like you aboard of me before, and damned bad cargo they are.”

Though, generally speaking, a mild sort of man, and one who knew his place, I was never one who could contentedly turn my cheek to the smiter; for though discretion is an excellent quality, I hold that it should never lean towards cowardice. I had not been accus-

tomed to usage of this sort, and I hardly knew how to take it. I stepped up to him and looked him squarely in the face.

"What reason have you for insulting me in this manner?"

He turned almost black with anger, and for the moment I thought he was going to hit me. If he had, I fear I should have hit him back.

"Insult you!" he roared, and out came a string of oaths. "By Heaven, sir, do you forget who I am?"

Had he been a port-admiral instead of the master of a dirty little tramp, he could not have given himself a grander air.

"No, sir, *I* don't," and by the emphasis I implied just what he liked.

He poked his angry face right into mine, his eyes burning horribly. His hot breath sweeping my face explained the cause of this unexpected outbreak. The man had been drinking.

"Look here," he said, "I shan't waste any more words over you. If you're too big to be told a thing, you and I shan't get on very well."

"But, sir, you quite misunderstand me. Why should I wish to run counter to you?"

"Then see that you don't, that's all. Now no more talk. Go forward, and don't forget that I shall keep my eye on you."

Was I a skulker, a rogue, or what? After all, one may have some feeling—even on a tramp. I said, and I would have said it had he been the devil himself, "I hope, sir, that I shall not forget for what purpose I shipped." Which meant that I also hoped other people would remember.

"You shipped to do what you're told," he replied. "That's quite enough for you."

With that he waved me forward, he himself strutting away aft, where he was immediately joined by his wife, who had viewed a little of this scene with evident concern.

As I passed below I met Craigiemore near the entrance to the engine-room. He greeted me with a half-amused, half-eager "Weel?"

"You're right," I said. "Captain Castle is indeed a verra curious person."

CHAPTER III

A LESSON IN NAVIGATION

ABOUT the third day out we passed the dreaded Macclesfield Bank, which, with the adjacent Paracel Islands and reefs, forms a pretty trap for the careless or unskilful navigator. That Captain Castle knew his China Sea I had not the slightest doubt, though the man who is too sure of his way is just the one most likely to stumble. I should not have cut it quite so fine myself; but I suppose it matters little how near one goes to danger so long as one escapes it. Some fellows will skim rocks with impunity to the end of the chapter, others strike at the first false step. He probably had passed the Bank at least a score of times, and in precisely the same manner, and what answered then must necessarily answer now. Still, if he had made his reckoning tally with mine, I could not help thinking him rash.

For the rest, he and I got on as well as could be expected, though naturally there was no love lost. He rarely addressed a word to me, and to my morning salutation merely nodded his head. This, however, concerned me little, for I had already taken his measure, and cared not twopence whether he liked me or not. I had shipped as second mate for the voyage, and I was determined that he should find no fault with me in my capacity as an officer of the ship. I flattered myself that I had been brought up in a school of which he must approve ; for with all his faults, chief of which was a violent nature run wild, he was not of the class one usually finds in command of a tramp. Indeed, under other conditions, with a severe disciplinarian placed over him, he might have made a capable officer. But unfortunately for him the contrary had been his experience. He had been placed in command of men before he could command himself, the result of which was almost sure to end in disaster.

But had I known him better, perhaps I would have credited him with less virtue. Though he kept quiet enough I knew he had

not forgotten our little quarrel, and I guessed that he only awaited the opportunity to take me down. Probably he had never been questioned in such a way before. It was a thing to which he was not accustomed. No captain is—a British captain above all others, who seems to live in constant terror of his own appalling greatness. Moreover, I had summed him up, or he thought I had, and the thought stung. In a dozen little ways he showed his contempt of me. When he gave me an order, he might have been flinging a skimpy bone to a dog. If I ever approached him to ask a question, or to carry a message from the mate, he always stared me insolently in the face before answering, and not infrequently I turned away with his jeering reply ringing in my ears.

But one day the fates favoured, or seemed to favour him. Having learnt that I had been the navigating officer of the Red Funnel boat, he had ordered me to take the sun with him every day at noon, and so work out our position. Accordingly I had done this, taking my paper to him as soon as it was ready. How near to his reckoning mine came I cannot say

but as he never found fault with me I imagined that there could be but a slight discrepancy between us. Indeed, I was under the impression—which was like my vanity, though the chart seemed to suggest it—that my paper was found extremely useful in determining the position of the ship. I was apparently labouring under a very serious delusion, which, somehow, Captain Castle did not succeed in dispelling.

He was sitting under the awning aft when I brought him my paper, his wife beside him. Pretty she looked in her cool white dress and her big white hat, and when she turned her face up to me I thought it looked almost as cool and white as her dress. She gave me a charming smile, to which I replied by gravely bowing and raising my cap. The old man looked up with his insolent, contemptuous leer, and held out his hand for the paper.

“You haven’t been long,” he said, in his slow, sarcastic way.

“The chief officer called me away, sir.”

He took the paper and opened it. I turned to go.

“Hullo,” he cried, “what’s all this? What

the devil do you mean by bringing me this sort of thing? Haven't I any one on board who can work out a simple sum in arithmetic? My stars, what a nice lot go to sea nowadays! Is this what you call navigation, eh? Where did you get your ticket—Singapore or Portland?"

I need hardly say that I was somewhat taken aback at this sudden outburst; but, suppressing the inclination to reply in fitting terms, I ventured to suggest that I had given him the wrong paper.

"No, not at all. 'Thursday, 25th.' Look." He handed it over to me.

"You are right, sir. It is to-day's."

"Then what does this mean?" he went on, examining the paper once more. "You are at least ten miles out in your longitude. A nice state of things, isn't it? Is this the way they navigate in the Red Funnel Line?"

"I believe their navigation is usually fairly accurate."

"Then you must be an extraordinary sample. Take this thing away and work it out correctly—if you can. Then bring it back."

Taking the paper from him I slunk off, for I

was never so shamed in all my life. Were we alone, his taunts would have been hard enough to bear ; but to jeer at me before a woman, well knowing that I dare not defend myself like a man, was intolerable to a degree. I feel conscious of having looked a fool : I know I felt like one. My face, sun-scorched as it was, flushed painfully. By the mocking light in his eyes I knew he enjoyed my confusion.

I strode away forward, every nerve in me throbbing with anger. But I was glad to get away, glad to withdraw from the range of his insolent eyes, and hers so calm and full of wonder. Somehow I had wished to stand well with this woman, and yet everything I did was turned to my disadvantage in her eyes. She interested me, and in a way I thought I interested her. We might have been good friends had not the captain interdicted the friendship. As it was, I believe she would have ignored that rather unnecessary decree had she not feared that I might suffer through her imprudence.

Though I knew that I had most assuredly worked out my sights correctly, yet for the

sake of being absolutely certain I carefully went over the work again, and with a like result. There could be no doubt that as far as I was concerned there was no mistake. I had had double proof, and if he would condescend to go into it with me I thought I could soon show him who was wrong. One thing was sure, I was in his bad books, and no humility on my part could make amends. He did not like me, and he guessed the feeling was reciprocated. He therefore laid himself out to annoy me and make me look small, and either the devil or the liquor, which is about the same thing, had turned his blood bad.

He was still taking his ease beneath the awning when I re-appeared, like a dunce at school, my work in my hand. He, stroking his big yellow moustache, looked up at me, his pale blue eyes twinkling with anticipated fun. His wife watched me earnestly, her face full of anxiety. I thought her lips moved. Indeed, as by an inspiration, I guessed they formed the two words, "Be careful."

"Well," he drawled, "have you discovered the error?"

"No, sir."

"Why is that?"

"There is no error to discover."

"Indeed," he sneered. "Then if that is the case it is I who am at fault?"

"I did not say so, sir."

"But you thought it, eh?"

"Some one has certainly made a mistake."

He rose quickly, his under lip quivering excitedly. Advancing, he looked me threateningly in the face.

"I see what it is," he cried passionately, "you're trying to provoke me, and I must admit you're doing pretty well: but be careful how far you go. I've had my eye on you for a long time; I've written you down, do you understand? and I shan't forget it either."

"Really, Captain Castle," I replied, "I don't know why you should speak to me like this. If I have in any way offended you, I can assure you that it has been entirely unpremeditated, and I beg your pardon. But this question of navigation touches my capacity as a competent officer. I think I am right, but if wrong I should like to be shown my error."

"Very likely," he jeered, pale with suppressed anger, "but the *Corea* is not a kindergarten for half-fledged navigators. I tell you that you are wrong. Isn't that enough?"

"Well, sir, since you ask for it—no."

He grew almost livid with rage: the blood even forsook his thick under-lip.

"I know what you want," he spluttered hoarsely, "and, my stars, you shall get it. I can see what it is, I can read you like a book: but let me tell you that there is only one master aboard this ship."

I bowed, and as I did so I caught an entreating look in the woman's eyes. Pity, anger, fear were all blended in that look, the whole appearing to consist of one great warning. Perhaps she was right, but whether right or not, I could not resist that appeal; though I was in the mood to have it out with the bully, let the consequences be what they might.

Luckily my better sense prevailed, and while yet master of myself I turned and went forward. After all, what credit would there have been in a victory over an irresponsible

drunkard? I was as sure of my navigation as mortal man could be sure of anything, and Captain Castle knew it, and doubted himself accordingly. He likewise knew that I had already summed him up, and his own conscience, brutal as himself, would have told him the truth. But it was most distressing, this continual state of loggerheads, and I found myself wondering at the strange freak which had cast me into this strange man's company.

The next morning, about a quarter of an hour before noon, and just as I was getting out my sextant, the mate appeared at my cabin door, and grinning his foolish, monkey grin, told me that I needn't trouble to get the instrument ready.

Guessing there was something in the wind, but determined not to show any surprise, I asked indifferently, "Why?"

"Navigation too bad. Old man disgusted. Swears he never came across such a duffer in all his life."

I laughed loudly, perhaps a little too loudly.

"The old man knows when he's well off."

"Eh!" said the mate, pricking up his ears.

"My dear fellow, it just amounts to this : The captain has found me out."

"Ay, that he has," grinned the fair gorilla.

"Found me out to be a man who knows a bit too much," I added with a fair semblance of modesty.

"Um," muttered the mate, "you don't hide behind the door anyway. But what do you mean by knowing a bit too much?"

"Merely this, that I should like to check the old man's reckoning."

"Oh, come," said he, "you're too dashed modest. Check the old man's reckoning!" and he roared at the thought. "And you just sacked because he had no patience with your stupidity. Oh, it won't do, you know, it won't do!"

"You forget that I have no appeal from him. Would you like to know the real reason why he has sent you with this message?"

"Don't trouble. Explanations only make matters worse."

"And yet I must explain. The reason why he has forbidden me any further to participate in the navigation of the ship is,—because he is not sure of himself, and he knows I know it."

"Pooh," laughed the mate, "what rot! He could go up and down the China Sea with his eyes shut. I daresay you're a very clever chap—I've heard of the smarties of the Red Funnel boats before to-day. But ten miles to the westward! Why you might have piled us up on the Macclesfield Bank."

"It would not have surprised me if we had struck. We must have gone precious near."

"So you say."

"I only say what I know, and you can tell Captain Castle so, with my compliments."

"I'll tell him, of course. It will please him immensely. Nor will I forget the compliments. He'll like 'em. But what I can't understand is that he should sack such a skilful navigator." The man was jeering at me, but I only laughed.

"I don't think you need trouble to ask yourself that question. Believe me, the old man knows what he's doing."

"Rather. What do you think?"

The fellow went off with a laugh, the insinuating tone of which lingered unpleasantly in my ear.

I took myself severely to task over this. Now that the breach had irrevocably widened, I tried hard to discover with whom the chief fault lay ; nor did I spare myself in any particular, though I fear my argument was most unconscionably prejudiced. Still, I had striven to do my duty, and strive I would while I was aboard the ship ; but Captain Castle was evidently a man who required something more than duty from a subordinate. That I was not prepared to give, and without it there could be no peace.

During my watch that afternoon he never came near the bridge, but spent most of the time in his long cane chair beneath the awning aft, smoking, drinking, and sleeping. His wife, on another long chair, lay stretched out beside him, and even from where I stood I could see that very little conversation was carried on between them. She had a book in her hand, which she made a pretence of reading, though her chief occupation seemed to be staring moodily out across the sea. It was singularly sad that even at this early date they had apparently exhausted every topic of mutual interest.

Later on in the day I happened to pass her as she was looking down the engine-room skylight. She turned, made a step towards me ; then suddenly drew back, her face flushing hotly. I saw the movement, and a half-glance over my shoulder showed me the cause of her confusion. The captain had just emerged from below. I raised my cap and hurried on : she turned to a still closer inspection of the flying pistons.

That night, just after two bells had struck the first hour of the middle watch, while I leant on the rail in the port corner of the bridge, gazing somewhat moodily out into the narrow sphere of sea, which the moonlight lit with countless quaint shapes, I thought I saw the glimmer of something white flitting about the after-deck. The impression, I might say, was flashed upon my mind ; but so absorbed was I in my own thoughts that I did not even take the trouble to look round, till that something white began to mount the steps beside me. Then I turned and saw that it was Mrs. Castle. She came swiftly up the ladder, and seeing me gave me a slight bow. Then without waiting for any move-

ment of mine, she walked towards the man who was steering, peeped in at the compass, and then made her way to the other end of the bridge. There, resting her face in her hands, she looked dead ahead into the misty night.

Meanwhile the ship swung on, pushing the water back from her heavy bows in long oily waves, waves which broke softly, monotonously pleasant. The engines kept up their dull thump, thump : the screw churned the water white astern. No other sound was there. We were a little throbbing world in a mighty still one.

Presently she changed her position ; then looking round she came over to me.

“I have been thinking a good deal over what occurred yesterday,” she said, a little abruptly, perhaps, and yet with a charming touch of diffidence. “I am very sorry for you, Mr. Quenton.”

“I am extremely grateful.”

“Now you don’t mean that, and you think me officious, eh ? Well, perhaps I am : most women are. What is left us but to interfere in other people’s affairs ?”

"Surely that is not the whole mission of woman?"

"No, perhaps not. Only of some. You are sorry for such? So am I. What a beautiful night!" As she turned her face to the sea I thought she sighed.

I stood beside her without speaking, though her abrupt manner of changing the conversation did not escape me. What though she had expressed sympathy in a casual sort of way, I could not forget that she was the captain's wife, and that from principle, if not from inclination, she must be my enemy.

"I understand," she said presently, "that this is your first voyage in the *Corea*?"

"Yes."

I saw her teeth gleam in the moonlight as she smiled.

"And it will be your last?"

"I'm afraid Captain Castle would not care to ship me for another voyage."

Again she smiled; then suddenly coming nearer, said, "You have been disappointed?"

After a moment's hesitation I admitted that what she suggested was substantially correct. She sighed and muttered something beneath

her breath. I thought she too seemed disappointed in a way.

"It seemed to me that Captain Castle was unnecessarily severe," she said. "I did not imagine he could be so harsh. It was distressing, most distressing. What would you have done if you had not been his subordinate?"

"Perhaps angered him still more."

"You are rather obstinate, Mr. Quenton!"

I admitted as much, but added that it was rather hard to be laughed at for an ignoramus when I knew I was right.

"Can one be sure of being right?"

"I think so—sometimes."

"It is of this I wish to speak. Do you know, you made the captain exceedingly angry?"

"I am very sorry."

"No, you're not, nor do I see any reason why you should be—if you are right."

"Dear madam, how can I talk to you—his wife? You think me obstinate. Well, perhaps I am; but this time I honestly believe myself to be right. Will Captain Castle take the trouble to prove me wrong?"

"I'm much afraid Captain Castle will have

nothing more to do with you. He is intensely annoyed. Indeed, I don't know what he would say if he caught me here talking to you."

"Perhaps he may come, madam."

"I don't think so. He's asleep—fast asleep. Of course, Mr. Quenton, I think you must be wrong," she added naively, "because a captain ought to be a better navigator than a second officer, oughtn't he?"

"Yes, of course."

"Now if you had only been as wise with him."

She came close to me and laughed in my face. But I read her meaning, and my heart went out to the sweet peacemaker.

"If he had only been you," I said.

The exclamation was unintentional—an involuntary tribute to her sweetness. I could see her eyes flash even though she stood in shadow. She looked like a lily of a woman—a sea-maiden. Then I smiled grimly as I thought of the incongruity of mermaids and China tramps.

"Well, we are one, you know, so it amounts to the same thing."

I watched her white form flit along the after-deck. When she reached the deck-house she stopped, and I guessed she looked back. Then she disappeared below.

I saw many sea-maidens before the mate came to relieve me at eight bells.

CHAPTER IV

JI JI GETS ANXIOUS

IN monotonous fashion the days slipped slowly onward. The captain rarely favoured me with a word now. If he condescended to return my morning salute, it was as much as I expected. Sometimes even this slight courtesy was ignored. There was no doubt of it, he had taken an insuperable objection to me, and nothing that I did found favour in his eyes. It followed as a matter of course that the others took their tone from him, and though they had not the courage to be downright rude, they let me see that they knew I was out of court. The captain's wife was, perhaps, the only exception ; though I don't include Craigiemore among the others, he and I continuing to be the best of friends. But of those who dwelt aft, Mrs. Castle was the only one who treated me with any considera-

tion. She had always a charming smile for me, and, if she could get the opportunity, a pleasant word ; but she never paid me any more moonlight visits on the bridge, and I will not say that life proved any the brighter for her prudence. However, I did my duty to the best of my ability, being determined to acquit myself with as much credit as was possible under the circumstances.

We were now well down the China Sea, and approaching the coast of Borneo. What particular point of land we should make, or whether we should make any, I did not know, for since my disgrace I had been debarred even a glance at the chart. Beyond a little natural irritation, subject to a plaguy bit of curiosity, I did not let myself run. After all, what did it matter what land we made, so that we eventually reached our destination in safety ?

In the meantime the old tramp plodded steadily along through the slow-moving sea, a glorious sun above her all day long, a dazzling moon at night. It seemed as though no monsoon had ever lashed this great, soft, sleeping sea to madness ; as though it knew

nothing of wrecks and the drowning cry of agony. No sign was visible here : all was serene and beautiful. Even our old tramp, belching out vile clouds of smoke, added to the glory of man and the greatness of God.

Early one morning we made land on the port bow. Then things began to brighten up a bit. The deck grew more animated : work was brisker ; and though the captain drank considerably during this period, I will say that he got about a good deal and was continually on the alert. We were now in the thick of a very intricate piece of navigation, and the mate told me that, all going well, we ought to run into Batavia in three or four days. I was not sorry. I would be less sorry when we once more ran into the harbour of Hong-Kong.

Hitherto our passengers forward had proved extremely inoffensive. Indeed they had spent most of their time between decks, smoking, fan-tan playing, or messing about with their disgusting food. They seemed, to all intents and purposes, the average hard-working coolie, and as such were quite unworthy the notice of any self-respecting European. But once

we had sighted the land, and were well amid the islands, they appeared for the first time to take an interest in life. Away forward, in the extreme bows of the ship, they sat for hours together scanning the horizon and talking eagerly. Nor did they confine themselves to that particular quarter, but indulged in the liberty of an occasional promenade aft when they thought no one was likely to be about.

But a still more attractive spot for them—or at least for one of their number, a big, long-limbed chap who stood a head and shoulders above his companions—was the engine-room skylight. For an hour at a time, even after his companions had gone forward, this fellow would stand gazing down at the flying machinery, eyes and mouth wide open, as though he could not see too much of the wonder, or inhale too much of the vile and stifling odour. Sometimes I passed him unexpectedly, and once or twice I gave his pigtail a playful tug. It was marvellous to see with what rapidity he turned about and faced me, and curious beyond words the transition of his face from apprehension and rage to

smiling humility. His smile was not alluring : it conjured up no pretty pictures, for it showed a mouth full of bad and prominent teeth. His little slits of eyes contracted to two black beads : his broad, squat nose stretched right across his face. The fellow, whose name was Li Chee, had nothing comforting about him, nothing open or benevolent. The devil himself, or his son the Chinese dragon, had squirted venom in his face.

But for some time now we had other things to think of than Chinese passengers. The navigation had become extremely intricate, and the captain rarely left the bridge. Indeed I must admit that, notwithstanding his many faults, he never neglected his duty at this trying period. I could see now the sort of man he was. With plenty of sea-room, and the engines running easily, he left things pretty much to themselves ; but when the opposite was the case he was at his post.

Well, slowly but surely we threaded our way through the islands, and when we eventually cleared the Carimata Channel we had a straight run right across the Java Sea to Batavia. Now, all seemed to be going well

with us, and the old man, freed of his arduous labours, went below to drink his own health. Considering all things, he had some cause for self-congratulation.

But that same night, about three bells of the middle watch, while I tramped mechanically up and down the bridge, now keeping a sharp look-out and now watching the moonlight skipping on the water, there came a sudden bumping and rumbling from away aft. The engines clattered horribly, and then raced with all their two thousand horse-power madness. But luckily only for a very little while. The steam was shut off, and they were stopped before any serious damage was done.

The sudden stoppage of the engines at sea has a most surprising effect on the voyager. People who have gone to sleep night after night with the grinding of the screw or the swirl of the waters in their ears, cannot sleep half as well without those noisy accompaniments. The vibration seems to enter and become a part of the individual: when that ceases he wakes.

In a few minutes everybody came tumbling

up on deck. Lights were flashed here and there : the mate blew his whistle, being at a loss for something to do, and presently the old man was heard aft roaring at the top of his voice.

In the first mad rush the general opinion was that we had struck. The crew ran hither and thither calling excitedly to each other : the passengers, gesticulating wildly, screamed to the crew for information. But in a very short time all the alarm and terror were dissipated. One whispered consolation to the other. It was nothing serious. True, the engines had broken down, but the damage would soon be repaired and the ship sent on her way.

The passengers and crew gathered in little groups here and there to discuss the situation, and by the uncertain flashings of a lantern, which our Chinese bo'sun carried, I could make out the long gaunt figure of the Chinaman Li Chee. He seemed ubiquitous, like the rest of his race. Head bare and pigtail flying, barefooted and scantily clad, he was here, there, and everywhere like a veritable imp of darkness, and, though I knew it

not, more of a danger than the disabled engines.

At length I was called from the bridge, and then I learned for the first time the seriousness of the disaster. The chief engineer had just come up from an examination, and as I approached he advanced towards the captain.

"Well, Campbell, well, well!" cried the old man irritably. "What's the extent of the damage?"

"Verra conseederable," replied the engineer in his dull, sententious way, "verra conseederable indeed."

"Well, what is it?" and the captain ground out an impatient oath.

"Weel," said Campbell, "it's a bad job, I'm thinkin'."

"Bad job, eh!" roared Castle, now quite beyond himself with anger. "Then why the devil don't you out with it, you blundering, dundering idiot!"

"Easy, my dear man," said the Scot. "I'm no used to the like o' such, Captain Castle. I tell ye it's a bad job, a verra bad job, indeed."

“But what is it?” roared the infuriated captain, and he chewed a whole mouthful of expletives.

“It’s just this,” said the engineer: “we’ve broke our shaft.”

“You don’t mean that, Campbell? Broken the shaft, you say?”

“Ay, sir; clean gone through like a bit o’ gas pipe.”

The captain, who was evidently still under the influence of liquor, began to blaspheme in a shocking manner. Indeed, I felt like saying my prayers where I stood, for I could not conceive the Almighty letting a ship float with such a monster on board. Moreover, I was painfully conscious of not having said my prayers for a long time, and this seemed an excellent opportunity. There is no time for praying like that in which one encounters a personal danger. Then every word comes straight from the heart.

The old man continuing to blaspheme, the Scot kept on repeating, “Shockin’, shockin’; it’s awfu’ shockin’ of ye, Captain Castle, man. God forgie ye, and the mither that bore ye, and the de’il that will get ye. Man, man,

will ye no listen to reason? The shaft is broke, ay, there's nae doot aboot that; but it's no sayin' that we shan't be able to make shift till we get to Batavy."

But the captain continued to rave. Such a thing had never happened to him before, and he accordingly damned his eyes and the eyes of the whole world, and in his wrath cursed the son-of-a-gun who constructed the engines, and every one connected with them.

"Not forgettin' yoursel'," muttered the engineer, though I doubt if Castle heard him. It was natural that Campbell should stand on his dignity. The accident, notwithstanding the captain's imputations, had happened through no fault of his, and there certainly was no one on board who could teach him his business. Captain Castle was a mighty fine fellow on the bridge, or with a whisky bottle in his hand; but the de'il might stop Campbell's grog for ever if the captain was much of a man among the cog-wheels.

Having delivered himself of a choice collection of epithets, which were enough to make the heavens fall, Captain Castle gradually

simmered down ; and presently, in a milder key, he inquired what the engineer proposed to do.

“ I’m for patchin’ it mysel’,” said the man ; “ but of course, captain, if you have anything better to suggest I’m willin’ to gie it my earnest conseederation.”

“ I have nothing better to suggest,” growled the old man, who saw through the affected humility of the engineer, “ and may the devil choke you with one of your own grease rags ! But see that you get to work sharp, that’s all. I don’t want to roll about here for eternity.”

“ Nay, it’ll no be in a place like this,” murmured the Scot.

“ What’s that your mumbling ?” cried the skipper.

“ Nay, I was only thinkin’,” answered the engineer.

“ Then keep your thoughts to yourself and get to work.”

“ Ay, ay,” muttered the man as he walked away, “ this comes o’ being over-friendly with the people above deck.”

The captain laughed. This was turning the

tables with a vengeance, and all because he had condescended to hobnob with a bit of greasy Scotch tweed.

Seeing me, he advanced swiftly and peered into my face.

“Well, what do you want?”

“You sent for me, sir.”

He seemed rather surprised at this, and for the moment was in doubt. Then he said, “Very well. Keep a good look-out and let me know if you see anything. We shall probably not get under way for the next four-and-twenty hours.” Then he turned on his heel and disappeared aft.

He had spoken hurriedly, beneath his breath, like a man who scarcely knows what he is saying. I could discern the guttural tones in his voice, the savage inconsequence of his replies, which reminded me of a dog who snarls for snarling’s sake. I guessed easily enough what had brought him to this pitch. In fancy I pictured him sitting forty fathoms deep, a whisky bottle in his cold dead hand.

The next morning I learned from Craigiemore that we should be exceedingly lucky if twice

twenty-four hours saw us under way. A careful examination had shown that the shaft had been tampered with, in so much as one of the supports had been purposely weakened. Who the villain was, or why he had done such a thing, no one seemed to have the remotest idea ; but Craigiemore admitted that they had some "terrible bad" characters down the stoke-hole, fellows who were capable of anything. As for the patching up, of which the chief engineer spoke so glibly, Craigiemore was not sanguine. To begin with, they had neither the men nor the proper appliances for such a task, and how, hampered with such conditions, could they succeed ? True, we were not far from Batavia—some two hundred and fifty miles or so—but taking all things into consideration, quite far enough.

The news that the shaft had been tampered with caused me much uneasiness, more especially as I on more than one occasion had seen the Chinaman, Li Chee, in close confab with some of our firemen. I also recollected that ugly fellow's penchant for the engine-room skylight, the odour of grease, and the suffocating smell of steam. Indeed, so much did it

prey on me that I suggested to the mate that it might be wise to watch our passengers closely, or put a little restraint on their movements; but the monster laughed so suddenly and uproariously that he almost spat his quid in my face. He taunted me with being a greenhorn, hinted that I was a cur, and that I ought to go home to my mother; which was a wise piece of advice in its way, but which I received with a stolidity that made him laugh louder than ever.

Now I don't think I was really a coward, though I would rather drink with a man any day than fight him. Of course I had got into trouble more than once during my comings and goings across the world, and that too in spite of my prudence, and a knack I had of looking ahead and right through things. I was by nature a man of peace, and never got into a scuffle if I could keep out of it, which I take it is not altogether cowardly, if somewhat cautious. Left to myself, I certainly should have clapped the hideous Li Chee under lock and key, for I firmly believed that worthy capable of giving us much trouble. Perhaps I did the gentleman an injustice.

If so, I was willing to apologise when all the danger was over. The police will lock up a man under suspicion, and what were we but our own police ?

Shortly after this unsatisfactory interview with the mate, our Chinese bo'sun, Ji Ji, approached me, a look of much importance in his thin, ugly face.

"Me speakee you, mas'r ?" he said.

"Certainly, Ji. What is it ?"

Ji looked carefully about him and then motioned me towards the rail. I followed him, wondering what possessed this sober-minded old chow. A good worker, and, for a Chinaman, fairly honest, Ji was a general favourite with all on board. It was agreed that you could get as much work out of him, without watching him, as you could out of any Chinaman living, and in our eyes he could have no better commendation.

He laid one hand on the rail and gazed seriously into my face, his ugly little eyes trying their best to look impressive.

"How long this ship leach Java ?"

"Why do you ask ?"

"Plenty leason. You sabbee big man, Li Chee?"

"Yes."

"Li Chee welly bad man—him plenty no good. No can pidgin to Li Chee."

"Really?"

"He come Canton side—what you call plisoner."

"So he has been in prison?"

"Plenty much. Li Chee welly bad man," and he shook his head gravely.

"Well, we must keep our eye on him, that's all. I don't like the look of him myself."

"Welly dam bad look," and he passed his long skinny fingers over his eyes. "How long you tink leach Java side?"

"About three days."

"Thlee day!" He looked mightily concerned. "Thlee day too muchee long, too muchee long," he added significantly.

"I'm afraid we can't shorten it. Come, cheer up Ji, old man. What the deuce makes you pull such a long face?"

"Me no likee this clew," he muttered.

"Why, what's the matter with the crew? Are they bad men like Li Chee?"

“Li Chee, he belong big bad man: he makee the clew big bad men.”

“I sabbee. So he’s been corrupting the crew?”

“Yes, mas’r—collupting the clew. Li Chee, he allee same collupt the debbil.”

This was serious, coming on the top of Craigiemore’s information about the tampering with the shaft, and what rendered it worse was the knowledge that we had a set of officers on board who wilfully shut their eyes to the movement of events. Because for years they had sailed these seas with impunity, and had successfully carried all sorts of inflammable cargo, it naturally followed, to their way of thinking, that they would continue to be successful. That is, if they thought of it at all, which I am inclined to doubt. Our mate had handled all sorts and conditions of coolies, though they are mostly of one sort—dirty and bad: our captain had condescended to carry them, though woe betide the wretch he caught prowling round the after-deck. This Captain Castle understood himself to be a man of considerable importance, and I was of opinion that he was

capable of much under an emergency; but unfortunately for us he was at this period in the midst of a prolonged carousal, and such being the case, it was not to be expected that he should think of such a little thing as the safety of his ship.

“Your news is serious, Ji, though I half-expected it. Still I can do nothing. The mate laughs at precautions: the captain is——”

“Dlunk, bah!” and the honest fellow spat disdainfully over the side. “Englishyman welly dam funny. He say, ‘Poor Chinaman! he smokee opium. Opium welly bad: opium kill the blain—makee mad—makee die. Poor Chinaman!’” and he laughed disdainfully. I laughed too, his disgust being extremely quaint. I knew the old rogue was a bit fond of the pipe himself. “But Englishyman,” he continued warmly, “he dlink whisky—blandy—lum—and makee mad—makee die, and Chinaman he say, ‘Poor Englishyman!’”

Though fully appreciating the irony of the worthy Ji Ji, who duly went up one in my estimation, I yet gave no outward sign of agreement; for I thought that sort of thing

rather derogatory to our race, and I could not countenance any lowering of the captain's dignity, though of that dignity I was not enamoured.

"That's all very well, Ji," I said, not wishing to argue such a delicate matter, "but the Englishman is a very great personage and must not be judged in common with an opium-smoking coolie. Just keep your eyes open, and let me know if you see anything suspicious."

"Cap'n no likee you, eh?" queried the fellow.

I admitted that we had had a slight misunderstanding, but that we now were exceedingly devoted to each other.

"Sabbee all li," and he smiled in an offensively knowing manner. Then seeing that I took his badinage but sourly, he grew serious. "This ship 'ave got dollar—plenty?"

"I believe so." Indeed I knew so, as I helped to take them on board. There were, if I remembered rightly, some eighty thousand of them.

"Ah, too muchee dollar. Li Chee—suppose he know—he."

He stopped suddenly, for at that moment

this very Li Chee appeared round the corner of one of the forward deckhouses and advanced towards us, a curious, irritating smile on his face. The rascal always smiled. I could imagine him fighting and dying with the same contemptuous curl of the lip, the same inscrutable twinkle of the eyes.

“Good molnin’, Mas’r Quenton,” he said in excellent English, his ugly face irradiated with inward laughter. “Welly solly this blakedown. When you tink ’im mend?”

“In a few hours.”

He looked surprised at this. “And Batavia—’ow long?”

I was just on the point of answering truthfully when the bo’sun cut in with, “Batavia—to-morrow molnin’, welly early.”

Li Chee looked reproachfully at his compatriot, as though he knew that worthy was lying; but Ji Ji kept his ugly face as solemn as a joss image.

“To-morrow?” repeated the bad man, turning to me for confirmation.

I nodded. “Certainly, if we can only get up steam enough.” Which in its way was perfectly true.

“See plenty ships to-night,” continued Ji Ji. “Batavia, Samalang, Austlalia, Singlaplore—all go this way.”

Li Chee looked from one to the other incredulously. Then he leant over the rail and spat viciously. If what the bo’sun said was true, the bad man was sadly out in his reckoning.

“Me no sabbee,” he said as he turned and went away forward, his bare heels making a clicking noise on the deck.

“You sabbee !” queried Ji Ji significantly.

“Plenty.”

I sabbeed much too well, though I wondered why Li Chee, if he were really as bad as we imagined, did not strike at once. Perhaps, even if he were conspiring, he had not the conspiracy quite to a head ; perhaps again our position, or our supposed position, did not suit him. That he doubted Ji Ji and me was certain, but that he was to a considerable extent in the dark was equally obvious.

I went once more to the mate.

“Mr. Minton,” I said, “I have good cause to believe that we have some very desperate

characters on board, and that they mean us no good. Don't you think we had better let the captain know?"

He came close to me and poked his ugly snub nose into my face.

"You be damned," he hiccuped, his dirty eyes rolling in drunken savagery. "If I had my way, I'd keep you in the stokehole for a month, that I would, and be damned to you."

Though a man of peace, as I have said, and, according to my own lights, of much prudence, I sometimes butt at my own philosophy. I have heard of people doing the like before: of preaching one thing and practising another. It was even so with me. I said, "If you were not drunk, you brute, I'd kick you."

It was a mad, a foolish thing to say, one for which I was sorry immediately after; but I think that in the mildest of men there are a few drops of hot blood which flow most erratically at times.

The mate stepped back and raised his hairy fist. His jutting eyebrows bristled up, his flushed eyes gleamed savagely. I have since

wondered what I should have done had he struck me. I fear I should have smitten him hard.

Luckily he changed his mind.

"If you were a man," he spluttered, "I'd know how to speak to you; but as you are only the backwash of a barge's bump, I'll see you damned." With which formidable outburst he once more waved his huge fist before my eyes and staggered aft. I went forward, feeling exceedingly lonesome and low-spirited. Apparently the old *Corea* was not going to prove the most delightful of homes.

CHAPTER V

THE CAPTAIN'S WIFE

WE officers kept watch as usual, though the ship lay idly rolling on the smooth sea. The engineers and their assistants hammered away for dear life below, producing an unceasing clatter which bore eloquent testimony to their prodigious labours. Occasionally the skipper staggered up to have a look round, but only at the rarest of intervals. When he did he made direct for the rail and clung to it like a man who is afraid to trust his legs. I passed him once, very close, having some business in the after wheel-house. His eyes met mine, and fearful he looked. A sodden wretch : one who ought to have been double-shotted and sunk out of sight. I think he saw something in my face that didn't please him, for he snarled out, "Hi, you—what's your name?"

I stood still and looked at him without speaking.

“What’s your beastly name?” he roared, holding to the rail with one hand, while he savagely clenched the other.

“Poor man!” I said. Perhaps it was meant for a thought rather than an exclamation; but whatever it ought to have been I certainly gave it utterance. His yellow face grew livid with rage. He did not appreciate my pity, or that soft word which turneth away wrath.

“I’ll tell you what it is,” he said, after sundry ineffectual splutterings, the while he clung to the rail like a peevish sick man who cannot rise, “this ship’s not big enough for you and me.”

I didn’t believe it was, but being one who always showed the utmost outward respect to my superior officers, I said nothing.

“You looked at me just now,” he blustered.

Really! I wouldn’t have believed myself capable of such a liberty.

“Looked at me in a way I didn’t like,” he added.

“In what way did I look, sir?”

"In a cursed, insolent, offensive way. Don't let it happen again."

"No, sir."

His impotence was painful to witness. I knew he would like to slaughter me, and yet all he could do was to cling to the rail and feebly jabber curses. No, on second thoughts I did not hate Captain Castle.

From a safer position forward I watched him for a few minutes longer. He still clung to the rail, and by the way he wagged his head I knew that he was still mumbling incoherently. Then he suddenly staggered across the few feet to the companion-way and went below. I saw him no more that day.

His wife also kept strictly to her cabin, dancing attendance on him, I had no doubt. Or perhaps other and more shameful reasons kept her below. It was a curious experience for a bride, and I tried hard to get into the lay of her thoughts; surely no very difficult task if I knew anything of human nature? Of the wooing of this strange pair I knew nothing, and I found that Craigiemore and the others knew as little. To me the woman's conduct seemed inexplicable: yet how could

I judge knowing so little of the true course of events? Captain Castle was rather a grand-looking man than otherwise, though I had but little affection for his big yellow moustache, which always seemed to me an insidious, downy sort of beast. But perhaps, being dark, I have a bias in favour of my own colour. Such a thing, I believe, is not absolutely unknown. One thing is certain, strangers meeting the captain would at once pronounce in favour of his looks, and I had no doubt that he could behave with a tolerable degree of decorum if the humour took him. When I first met him he might easily have passed for anything but what he was. And who was she? What was her story? What did I know of it? And what business was it of mine?

What went on above deck during my watch below I cannot say, but all through the long hours I heard the incessant beat of the hammers as the engineers grappled manfully with their gigantic task. But though they worked all that day, and far into the night, Craigiemore told me, when he crawled up half-dead for a mouthful of fresh air, that the

job was not yet half through, and that he was not too sanguine of its success even when finished. This was cheering news, though it only made me comparatively happy. I was getting surfeited with good things.

The second morning broke like the first, giving every token of a hot, clear day. The sea in here was wonderfully smooth and innocent-looking, and at times I fancied I could see the coral beds lying many fathoms below. Again the picture came to me of my revered captain lying away down there in a coral bed, a whisky bottle in his cold dead hand. It would have made a singularly pathetic picture, but I had no wish to go down so far—not yet for a long time. The *Corea* was bad, and there were some bad men aboard of her, but there might be many things much worse some fifty fathoms down.

They were but dull days, lying there flopping about in the great swell. The sun beat down on our tarry decks till every seam and grease spot fairly bubbled, while to make matters worse the mate sent up to say that the third and I were to take watch and watch about,

as he was too ill to take his turn. I knew what that illness meant—an attack of laziness brought on by too much grog—but there was no gainsaying the order.

Throughout the best part of that sweltering day I tried to keep myself awake and the crew at work; but it was a task that fairly taxed my powers and took the stiffness out of my back. Occasionally Ji Ji came to me with some whispered information concerning the bad man Li Chee, who sedulously kept between decks, and who, from information received, appeared to be in a condition of extreme unrest. After all, it is not so easy to do wrong, with success, as many imagine; while mutinies and conspiracies have an unfortunate predilection for being nipped in the bud; which shows that conspiracies are abhorred of Heaven, or that the conspirators are only half-hearted. If Li Chee meant to strike, he deserved the utmost contempt for not striking now. Not that I was in a particular hurry. Indeed I much preferred to wait till we were swinging at anchor off Batavia. I was not absolutely dying for a better acquaintance with the worthy Li,

though no doubt I should have found his a most interesting personality.

Well, the second day dragged slowly on beneath a most exasperating sun, which insisted upon shining his very brightest and hottest. There was not a breath of air on the sea: it was frightful, sweltering heat. The very water seemed to throw back a reflection that scorched the eyes. It was thick and oily, and seemed on fire half the day. In those latitudes the sun comes down pretty straight, down like a sheet of flame right on the top of one's head, and woe betide the fellow whose skull is not of more than average thickness. Fortunately, and I say it with pride, mine was. I had a fairly stout covering to what bit of brain God had given me, and it behaved with infinite credit. Mind you, I never was one who thought more of the outside of a head—unless it was a woman's—than I did of the inside; but when it comes to tropic suns and hard blows one needs a fairly thick skull.

I was in an amazing doze when the sun sank, but I was glad, when I awoke, to find him gone: sunk in the bottom of the sea.

I devoutly wished the beggar would stay there till I called him.

The night was stagnant, oppressive ; but the awful glare was gone, and the innumerable stars looked clean and cool. The ship still lunged and floundered about in the great swell, flopping from side to side like a fat woman, and smashing the phosphorus into thousands of dancing stars.

I think it must have been about ten o'clock. I had a vague recollection of having heard four bells go some few minutes previously, when of a sudden something touched my arm. I was looking over the side at the time watching the fish cleave long lines of light as they dashed through the phosphorescent water. I was dreaming, I think, dreaming of—— But no matter what I dreamt. It was something very foolish, no doubt : about a mother, I suppose, or a sister, or something equally absurd. An officer on duty has no right to dream at all. But whatever it was, the touch soon awakened me, and I started back with a bound. No, no, it was not Ji Ji nor Li Chee, nor any of his infernal crew. It was the captain's wife,

bareheaded and dressed in white ; dressed as she was the night she came to me on the bridge.

“ Did I startle you ? ”

Her voice, though low, was so sweet that it rang in my ears like music. I have since thought some pretty things about sirens, and how the sea makes musical a woman's voice. But I am like that. Some really fine ideas come to me when I don't want them.

I admitted as much : she did startle me.

“ What were you looking at so earnestly ? ”

“ These fish. Come here.”

The words were certainly short, but I am inclined to think the tone was more gracious ; because she came as she was bidden and looked long and strangely into the brilliantly-illuminated water.

“ How beautiful ! ” she said, “ how gloriously cool and beautiful ! Was there ever such an inviting bed ? ”

“ A most uncanny bed,” I admitted. I had no fancy myself for the like, much preferring the greasy deck of the old packet.

“ But so peaceful.”

“ Perhaps : look at the fish.”

She looked at me as though I were a goth or a vandal wild-fowl. The thought of the fish had never entered her pretty head. She would think the grave lovely, and never dream of worms. But I knew what she thought. The devil burn me badly if I hadn't thought something of the same thing as I stood watching the fishes ; but I wasn't going to give way to the silly sentiment. It seemed right enough in me, but it was sentimental rubbish in her. Moreover, I don't think I half liked her encroaching on my preserves. What right had a bride of a couple of weeks to think of such things ?

She was silent for a while, and I who felt a trifle absurd had nothing to say. If I had spoken, I should not have improved my position. I let her think, knowing that I was the subject of her thoughts ; though I feared for the manner in which I should emerge from the ordeal. And yet a strange sudden beating of the heart told me I knew what she wanted.

“You must think me horribly sentimental, Mr. Quenton ?”

I thought her charming, and almost had

the audacity to tell her so. But, as I have said before, I am a prudent man.

"I am very fond of the sea," she said.

"So am I—when I am in port."

"Of course ; *you* are a sailor."

"And you are a sailor's wife. You'll soon get to hate it as much as I do."

She started at my reference to her husband, and seemed not to hear the rest of my speech. I marked the swift rise and fall of her breast. Then she turned, and looking down into the water, sighed. Pretty goings on, thought I, for a bride of two weeks.

Presently, looking up at me, she said, "What do you think of sailors, Mr. Quenton?"

"They are a noble race of fellows," I answered with enthusiasm.

She smiled in spite of herself, though I knew she was thinking of the drunken dog between decks.

"I am rather disappointed in them."

"You astound me!"

"Mr. Minton, the chief officer, is a sailor!"

"Is he indeed?" I asked incredulously.

"I do not think he is a nice man, and I am

surprised that Captain Castle should think so much of him."

"He has been with Captain Castle for some time. No doubt they understand each other."

"Too well," she muttered.

Again she turned, and for several moments watched the sea in silence. I stood watching her and thinking how sad was her disillusionment. A young ignorant girl suddenly thrown into the society of a drunken reprobate! I was deep-laden with pity: my freeboard scarce showed above the water.

"Of course you know," she said, "that Captain Castle has taken a violent dislike to you?"

"It has grieved me immeasurably."

But she didn't laugh, she didn't even smile: her eyes sought out mine with a grave, clear insistence.

"You do not understand. Physically he may not be able to harm you; but there are many ways of killing without skinning."

"I hope it is not as bad as that."

"You must take me seriously, Mr. Quenton. You can't imagine that I speak like this

without an effort? Neither Captain Castle nor Mr. Minton has a word to say in your favour."

"I am sorry, of course, for if I have one weakness it is that my fellow-man should think well of me. I have never wilfully done anything to disoblige Captain Castle or Mr. Minton: indeed, prudential motives alone would not sanction the folly. I can only add that I am sorry, and that I wish the voyage was over."

"Ah," she said, "don't I!" And if ever a woman was in earnest it was this two weeks' bride.

I clean forgot my own position in the contemplation of hers. That the captain should have taken such a violent dislike to me naturally occasioned me much concern; that the mate should have followed suit was what a very ordinary intelligence might have expected. My first interview with the latter was not propitious: the former, perhaps, had some reason, but not enough, I thought, to let his enmity sink deep. A good man is all the better for a burst of passion, but a surly brooder is an abomination. I could have

found it in my heart to forgive him his dislike of me, but that he should forget himself before his young wife was a thought not to be endured. A pretty woman too, one whom he must have loved much ; for a man is not usually in a hurry to give a woman his name—unless she brings him money. I did not think she had brought him any. Under such conditions even Captain Castle would not play the blackguard for at least six weeks.

I thought she looked very fragile as she stood there gazing down into the water : a white sad figure round which I was involuntarily building a huge halo of romance. Not that romance was much in my line. Indeed I despised such sentimental rubbish, and speedily relegated it to the limbo of absurdities. There was too much sentiment aboard the *Corea*. I wasn't going to let it influence me. But much as I dislike it myself, and convinced as I am that I can always keep it in check, I was inclined to think it not amiss in her. I felt sure that, had I been the biggest scoundrel afloat, she should not have discovered it under a month.

I started, and was about to say something infinitely consoling, for I was feeling very paternal just then, when there was an oath, a sudden shuffling of feet, and the captain lurched between us. He seized her by the shoulder, and so rudely, that she cried out with the pain.

“What do you mean by this?” he cried.

“What are you doing here?”

Swinging herself free she faced him.

“How dare you lay your hand on me?”

He laughed coarsely, but he was so unsteady on his legs that he had to cling to the rail for support.

“I thought you were in bed: I find you here with—who is it?” peering into my face. “Ah you! what the devil are you doing here?”

“It’s my watch, sir.”

“Is this the way to keep it—loafing round the quarter-deck?”

“You forget, sir, that the ship is not under way.”

He must indeed have forgotten, for he looked over the side and then muttered incoherently to himself.

“Under way or not, I’ll not have my orders disobeyed,” he fumed with charming inconsequence. “You are taking too much upon yourself, Mr. Quenton. You and I will have to come to an understanding presently.”

“Mr. Quenton is not to blame,” said his wife. “It was I who came to him.”

“I thought I told you that I did not approve of Mr. Quenton?”

“That made me all the more eager to cultivate his acquaintance.”

He ground out an oath for which he should have been kicked right round the deck, and said certain things which no man should say to his wife, and for which, had we been ashore, he might have smarted. I hope I am an obedient man and a prudent one; but my toes itched terribly. His wife shrank from him in horror, while I, fearing that my boasted prudence might make a fool of me, made my way forward. As I walked along I heard him still railing loudly at her, though what he said I was fortunate enough not to hear. Captain Castle was getting beyond a joke.

The next morning Ji Ji came to me with

a long face, though I doubt if it was much longer than my own.

"Clew getting welly leckless," he said ; "last night Li Chee go down among them and talkee talkee plenty long time. This molnin' he came speakee me. He say, cap'n dlunk, mate dlunk—ebelybody dlunk. No tlubble takee ship, takee dollar. Sabbee ?"

"Sabbee plenty. And what did you say ?"

"Me say, cap'n no dlunk, mate no dlunk, ebelybody no dlunk—only pletend. But Li Chee, he laugh with all him bad teeth. Li Chee bad man, welly bad man. No can fool bad man : only can fool good man."

"Well, Ji, what are we to do ? I can't go to the captain. He doesn't like me : he would laugh in my face, just as the mate did."

Ji looked very serious, but when I suggested that he might go, he solemnly shook his head. The fact is, much as he wished the conspiracy nipped in the bud, he would not presume to approach such an exalted individual as the captain, and I knew that no pressure would make him.

"Suppose," he said, "suppose you all 'ee

same speakee along Missee Cap'n ? She plenty sabbee : she tell ole man."

"Why, Ji, it's as much as my life's worth."

Ji looked as though he had played his last card. But after a few moments of gloomy reflection his honest face lightened.

"Suppose you lite ?"

Ay, to be sure — if it were necessary. I might easily write what I could not say. And, after all, it might be necessary. Though I had no love for Captain Castle, and wouldn't have cared much if his cranky old packet had taken a sudden dive down some fifty fathoms or so, I had no wish to go with her. His ruin would assuredly mean mine, and hers, and Craigiemore's ; but it would chiefly mean mine. I had no fancy for a stab from Li Chee's creese : the very thought of it made me queer all over. It may be a very heroic thing to shed the blood of others, but to shed your own is rank idiocy.

So I snipped out a leaf from my notebook and wrote as follows :—

"Dear Madam,—Will you tell the captain that the crew is disaffected, and that the passengers forward are in a state of revolt ?

If something is not done at once it may be difficult to foresee the result."

I did not sign my name, or even my initials, for I guessed that if her husband saw it he would at once condemn it. I handed it over to Ji Ji, telling him that it must be delivered into the Misse Cap'n's hands, and into the hands of no other. He went off looking reassured.

A few minutes later he returned. Across the back of my note the captain had written, "If you don't mind your own —— business I'll have you put in irons."

CHAPTER VI

MUTINY

IT was not till the afternoon of the fourth day that we were ready to proceed once more, and then it was only at half-speed. The work had been extremely difficult, and was nothing more or less than a triumph of desperate energy. As it was, Craigiemore shook his head solemnly when I questioned him, though he admitted that it was no bad job under the circumstances. This might mean much or little, but I guessed it meant a good deal, coming from him. When I learned afterwards that it was mainly owing to him the work had been completed at all, I didn't think any the less of his reticence.

But in the meantime the old vessel waddled slowly onward, making up the leeway in her own peculiar style. That we had a considerable leeway to make up I did not doubt, for

the currents run briskly at times round some of these islands. We were now well out in the Java Sea, free of all sign of land, which proved that we had been drifting in a southeasterly direction. Well, we had plenty of sea-room now, and all going smoothly, we ought to see the Java coast rise before we were many hours older.

Two or three times during the night the engines were stopped while an examination was made of the shaft, an examination which lasted but a few minutes. Then came the slow grind, grind, as she was once more sent on her way. As I lay listening in my bunk I heaved a sigh of relief. Every throb of the screw brought us so many yards nearer our destination—brought me nearer the end of my contract, and my forced association with uncongenial company. Though I have remarked before that sailors are always in a desperate hurry to reach port, I had never experienced such intense eagerness till now. It was curious, but I hated every mile of water that lay between us and Batavia.

An eager, restless watch I kept that night, expecting every moment to hear the sudden

thump, bang, which would tell of the shaft having gone again ; but heavily the slow hours dragged on, and when the mate came to relieve me, the old ship still pushed forward at from four to five knots an hour.

I went below feeling thankful for small mercies ; and secure in the knowledge that our progress, if slow, was sure, was soon fast asleep. But my sleep was not as serene or uneventful as one in my state of mind had a right to expect. There were some distressing pictures of the captain and his young wife, and some very ugly doings with the redoubtable Li Chee, who seemed over-fond of flourishing a formidable knife which had a blade as big and ugly as a hedger's scythe. That he meant to kill us all I had not the slightest doubt : I could see it in the hideous softness of his smile. Why he did not, seeing we were all unarmed and entirely at his mercy, I was sorely puzzling myself to discover when of a sudden I awoke.

At first I really thought Li Chee was upon me, and half-dreaming though I was, I whipped my hand under the pillow for my revolver, where I had slept with it ever since things

began to look black. But there was no Li Chee, only a most ominous stillness, which was worse. I sprang to the port and looked out. It was broad daylight, the sun rising red and angry away on the port quarter : but we had come to a standstill. Whether we had stopped for a further examination of the shaft, or whether the shaft itself had gone again, I could not say. But of course I thought the worst. For a moment I hesitated whether to turn in again, or go up and see what was the matter : then my anxiety getting the better of me, I slipped the pistol into the pocket of my pyjamas and rushed up on deck.

As I did so half-a-dozen fellows who were crouching behind the funnel made an immediate set at me ; but I seized a huge bar of iron that lay athwart the engine-room skylight and held it threateningly aloft. This kept the rascals in check, for there was murder in my face and a fearful brain-smasher in my hand.

For a moment they stood looking at me and I at them ; then that arch-thief Li Chee pushed his way forward, and smiling most graciously salaamed with all the obsequiousness of a true oriental.

“Welly solly to seem lude,” he said, “but ’ave made plenty mistake. Tink you nudder man, sabbee !” And he smiled his oily smile till I felt quite bilious.

“Don’t mention it,” I answered ; “there’s no harm done. But,” as the oily one continued stealthily to advance, “keep back,” and I took a tighter grip of the bar.

Li’s benevolent face expressed the utmost concern. Though he smiled, and smiled as fondly as before, it evidently caused him much grief to think I had so little faith in human nature.

“Mas’r Quenton angly,” said the fellow penitently ; “what for Mas’r Quenton angly ?”

“Good cause, I should think. What the deuce do you mean by rushing me in this mutinous fashion ? I tell you what it is—if you don’t go forward at once, you’ll be sorry for it.”

“Li welly solly,” said the rogue hypocritically. “Engine, ’e blake down : wakee Li up flom sleep : Li glow welly flightened : lush up on deck, tinkee you engineer—that’s all.”

As the ingenuous one offered this explanation

he smiled more sweetly and blandly than ever, backing slowly as he spoke.

It was then I for the first time thought of my pistol, which shows what a blundering man-o'-warsman I was after all. But then fighting was not my business, and it ought to be nobody's business unless there's a good pension and plenty of glory at the back of it. Indeed, without those two inducements I think there would be little war, for I never yet met the man who cared so much for a rap on the nose that he yearned to lose a leg.

But seeing the man Li make a pretence of retreating, and thinking a little apparent confidence might not be out of place, I dropped my bar, looked Li straight in the face as much as to say, "There, you see how I trust you," and was about to put it down. But a moment's reflection suggested another thought. I had shown them what a formidable weapon of assault it was: suppose they were wise enough to profit by the lesson? John Chinaman's antipathy to the "foreign devil" is not so great as to prevent him taking a useful hint. Without more ado I swung the bar over the side.

Li, grinning till he showed every bit of his horrid white gums, immediately advanced, his right hand going up under his loose blouse to his belt. For what reason I guessed. But I was quicker than he. In an instant I had him covered.

“If you move a step I’ll shoot.”

His hand came down from under his blouse—empty : but he looked very blue.

“Mas’r Quenton no unnerstan’,” he said sorrowfully. “Li Chee welly solly Mas’r Quenton no unnerstan’.”

“Anyway, you keep back. Li Chee unnerstan’ that?”

“Sabbie,” he said, but it was with a tone of the most profound regret. It evidently cut him to the heart to think his pure motives should be so persistently misconstrued.

Presently a voice, a voice I knew too well, yelled out from the other side of the skylight—

“You, there ! What the devil’s the meaning of this rumpus ?”

With a quick backward movement I slipped from Li and his companions and darted round to the old man, who stood there just as he

had sprung from his bed—barefooted and in his pyjamas. The red light of the early sun struck flush on his distorted face. I thought I never saw a man look a more pitiable wreck.

“Hollo!” he cried, as I sprang panting to his side, “it’s you, is it? Damn you, you’re always in my way.”

“It may be a good thing for you that I am,” I answered crossly. I could have kicked him for his cursed incivility.

“Heh!” he said, “what’s that?” and his pale eyes shone ominously. “Look here, you son-of-a-gun,” he began.

“Sir,” I cried, “for God’s sake don’t let us quarrel now. Look!”

I pointed to Li and his men, who were quietly surrounding us.

“What does this mean?” he asked, not liking, I could see, the attitude of the yellow men.

“I think it very serious, sir. The shaft has gone again, and the crew, led on by the passengers forward, have mutinied.”

“Mutinied, have they?” he cried desperately; “by God, mutinied have they! I’ll soon let

them know!" He strode savagely towards Li and the half-dozen men who stood between him and the quarter-deck.

"Hi, you there!" he shouted, "go forward at once—every mother's son of you!" But not a man of them moved. I saw each dirty right hand go up under each dirty blouse: when it came down again it held a long knife.

The captain fell back with an exclamation of terror. Bad as the business seemed, he had expected nothing like this. Li Chee smiled seraphically.

"Good molnin', cap'n," he said, saluting quite respectfully, "a welly nice molnin' indeed. Me 'ope Misse Cap'n no hully go Java side? The *Colea* a welly unfortunate ship, cap'n: 'e blake 'im shaft—no can go. Li welly solly. Li say, 'Poor cap'n, poor Misse Cap'n.' Poor engineer 'ave work welly 'ard: Li welly solly for poor engineer: Li welly solly for ebelybody." But even as he spoke so kindly, and smiled so reassuringly, he ran his horrid little finger with its horrid long nail up and down the keen edge of his creese.

"What's the meaning of this?" gasped the old man, who saw and knew perfectly well what it meant. But I suppose he had to say something, poor beggar; make some show of authority. Then he began to bluster: vowed he would clap them all in irons and hand them over to the authorities when we arrived at Batavia.

Li positively beamed. His delight was so great that I believe he would have danced a fandango if he had only known how.

"Cap'n welly good cap'n," he said, "but dlink two muchee no good. Li allee same belong new cap'n now;" and out went his ragamuffin of a chest just as I had seen the skipper stick out his, when he suddenly remembered his greatness. "Ole cap'n he likee plenty dlink, plenty long dlink. Welly good. Plenty long dlink 'ere." He waved his hand over the wide expanse of sea.

"You villain," roared the captain, still hoping to overawe them with fierce words and looks, though no one could fail to note his extreme uneasiness, "would you murder me?"

Li looked the sorrow he could not speak.

I believe he would have cried had he not feared it would give us too much pain.

“No, cap’n,” he said; “Li welly kind man. Li the welly kindest man that ever lived. Cap’n likee plenty dlink: Li give ’im plenty dlink.”

The old man turned to me a hopeless, imploring look.

“He means it too,” I said. It was a mean thing to do, considering his condition, but I couldn’t help it. I will even admit to a momentary glow of satisfaction, but no more. After all, I was as badly off as he; and though I did not reckon his life as much when placed in the scale with mine, I guessed that the loss of one would probably mean the loss of two.

The captain looked this way and that, as though seeking a means of escape; but the mutineers surrounded him on three sides: at his back was the sea.

“Where’s the mate?” he roared. “Minton, hi there, Minton!”

Li quickly communicated his whereabouts. The mate had been secured, and was now bound to the port corner of the bridge, and

in such a way that he was still enabled to keep a good look-out. The third was shut up in his room : the engineers were secured below. The firemen and greasers had joined the revolt, and were now lording it over their erstwhile masters.

All this Li told in his most insinuating voice, with his most winning smile, and neither I nor the captain doubted him for a moment. Indeed I believe I would have shared a similar fate had I kept below a minute longer. The captain would have been an easy victim. As it was, the saloon was the only part of the ship which was not entirely in the hands of the mutineers.

Captain Castle looked at me and I looked at him. It was a quick, searching, and yet irresolute look ; a look which, while it proclaimed his impotence, yet showed its distrust of me. And yet, notwithstanding a decided antipathy, he must make the best of a bad bargain. I believe I smiled : I know I did inwardly even in the face of our great danger. We were met on a common level now, and I believe he thought I was the better man. Or if he didn't, I made up for his lack of

appreciation by believing so myself, though I duly deplored his want of penetration.

True, there was little love or confidence in his look, but I was a unit, and units were very useful just then. It must have been hard for him to do it, but the thought of that long drink of the Java Sea was enough to make any man's stomach turn, especially a stomach that has grown accustomed to the soothing influence of good Scotch whisky.

He made the best of it as he turned to me.

"Quenton."

"Sir?"

"There's nothing for it but to make a rush aft."

"Easier said than done," I muttered.

"Hand me over your pistol. I'll soon clear the way."

Much as I loved the man and admired the officer, I felt unable to comply with this request. Moreover, I had no wish to see blood, for I guessed that the first drop spilt would end in a hideous massacre. And yet, if we wished to retain the semblance of authority, it was imperative that we should

reach the deckhouse aft, or gain cover of some sort.

Though it takes some time to describe, it all passed very quickly. It was evident that Li would not be able much longer to control the more adventurous spirits of his band, who were already chafing under the restraint. Some exceedingly ugly looks were shot at us from beady black eyes, and presently an inward movement was made. It was now or never. I stepped before the old man, and raising my pistol pointed it fair in Li's face.

"You sabbee this?" I said.

He shrank back grinning a ghastly grin.

"Sabbee," he muttered.

"Then stand aside."

As I spoke I edged aft, the man falling back before me. I manœuvred so as to get them in a lump abreast of the skylight, or forward of me, leaving the way to the deckhouse clear; and ere they had quite grasped my intention I had to a considerable extent succeeded in carrying out this plan. Then Li said something sharp and quick under his breath, and three of the hindmost men

suddenly darted forward. At once I guessed what the order had been. The men were to run round by the funnel and take us in the rear.

“Now, sir—quick!”

The captain did not require a second telling. I heard his bare feet swish over the deck as he bounded aft. Li made a spring and I fired, but purposely missed him. The mutineers uttered a sharp cry of alarm, though none of them was hit, and taking advantage of the momentary confusion, I slid rapidly sideways in the wake of the captain. Quite half the distance I traversed in this manner, when with a sudden yell they rushed towards me.

There was no time for fancy action now. I turned my back on them and bounded aft for dear life. My destination was only a few yards off, but I covered the distance with a speed which has amazed me ever since. Fortunately the deckhouse door was on the swing. Like a flash I bounded through and swung it to after me, but not so quickly as to escape a knife which came hissing in my wake. Luckily it was nothing more than a flesh wound in the shoulder; but had the

blade struck me point on, instead of on the slant, the blow might have proved exceedingly dangerous.

Once the door swung to, I laid hold of the handle and hauled on for dear life, while I snapped the key in the lock: then I shot the little brass bolts into their sockets, which were wormed out of the woodwork. This done I sprang across to the door on the port side, which fortunately was shut, and made it equally secure. To be sure the security was not very great, but the doors being heavy and opening outwards, rendered them anything but easy to force.

Quick as I was, I was not a moment too soon. Ere I had slipped the first bolt into its place a dozen savage blows were rained upon the door. I watched it anxiously, but it was stoudy built and stood well. Then I had a brief respite for reflection, and little consolation got I out of it. I was sorry that I had pretended to fire at Li Chee, for till then nothing but words had passed between us. To begin with, he may have had no intention of murdering us: now it must seem his life or ours, and that meant ours.

For what was this shelter but a temporary refuge at best? With all the other officers captive or dead, what hope was there for us? The doors must give way once they were attacked in earnest, and then, though each shot of my revolver told, the end for me would be the same.

There may be some satisfaction in dying for one's country, but there is absolutely none in dying for one's self. There is no *éclat*, no distinction about it. A coolie creese rummaging in one's internals cannot be a very delightful sensation. But there's no knowing. Only I didn't fancy it, and in my despair I roundly cursed the drunken stupidity of the commander of the S.S. *Corea*.

By the way, where was he? For the first time I took a glance down the companion, and there, standing at the foot of the steps, looking up at me with the most intense alarm depicted on his face, stood that hero. I smiled, and instinct told me that that smile was first-cousin to one of Li's oily ones.

But in the meantime blows were aimed incessantly on the doors, and with such vigour that I stood in awful expectation of

seeing them suddenly give way. I pictured it all, went through it all quite realistically—even to the sensation of being run through by the villainous creese. A vivid imagination is not always an unmixed blessing.

Suddenly the captain's voice reached me from below, and a husky, querulous voice it seemed.

“Quenton.”

“Sir?”

“How long do you think those doors will hold?”

“Quite impossible to say, sir; but not long once the men set to work in earnest.”

He relapsed into silence, and strangely enough the noise outside ceased at the same moment. I stooped low against the lock and listened, but no sound of any description reached me. The stillness was something awful. What did it mean? what did it foretell? Just then it seemed to me that of all the agonies that which is called suspense is the greatest.

Presently the captain's voice came again.

“What do you think they intend to do?”

“Make themselves absolute masters of this

ship. What they will do with us afterwards depends on the mood they're in."

"By God, Quenton, they mustn't take the ship!"

All very well, but how were we to stop them?

He didn't know, and with a despairing oath admitted it; but stop them we must. The ship must not be given up.

"Well," I said, "though fighting is not my business, to save the ship, if possible, is. I am ready to back you up in anything. What do you propose?"

A second—ten—twenty passed and he never spoke. Outside, the mutineers were still as quiet as death, though now and again came a great solitary splash as the ship floundered in the heavy swell.

"What arms have you got?" I asked.

"I think I have a revolver somewhere, but—but I'm not sure. If you'll keep guard there a minute I'll go and see. You won't let them in, Quenton?"

"Not if I can keep them out."

"That's a good fellow. A pity we didn't understand each other before."

“Yes,” I answered drily. . It is so easy to treat a man respectfully when you want to get something out of him.

“See that you reload the empty chamber of your revolver, and shoot the first man that shows his ugly face.”

I laughed somewhat unpleasantly to myself. I don't think Captain Castle would have felt pleased could he at that moment have seen a reflection of my mind. No flattering portrait of himself would he have found there : just a flabby piece of putty of a man, wobbling this way and that : never steady for a second. Not that my own courage was anything to boast about. Indeed I felt some uncanny shivers run down me as I thought of my probable end. It was a bad business whichever way I looked at it, with no back door to sneak out through, and I deplored that eagerness for adventure which had led me into the byways of the ocean.

CHAPTER VII

BESIEGED

IN the meantime I was anxious to ascertain what was keeping the mutineers so abnormally quiet, the hope that the engineers had in some way broken free, and were causing trouble, coming to me. For Hope, cruel as she is, comes with a soft face and a flattering smile, making the worst extremity tolerable. Like many other people I had often said that a drowning man will cling to a straw; but I never really knew the meaning of the adage till I stood there hoping against hope. Every moment I wondered if I should hear Craigiemore cry out in his broadest Scotch, "Open the door, man, open the door;" and though I had never been an unreasoning worshipper of the northern accent, I am sure it would have sounded just then like the sweetest of music.

But Craigiemore not appearing, it behoved me to cast about for some means to appease my curiosity. This deckhouse, which formed the only entrance to the saloon, had, beside the two doors mentioned, a corresponding window or porthole, and a little bit of a skylight on the roof, just big enough to ventilate the place when the doors were shut. To reach this last being a physical impossibility, I turned my attention to the porthole just above me. It was of the usual size, with the usual thick, opaque glass, through which the light came dully, but through which it was next to impossible to see. And yet it was imperative that I should see, my anxiety quite subduing my prudence. I loosened the screw and listened. No sound: nothing but the lapping of the little waves against the great iron plates of the ship, as she rolled with slow motion from side to side. I took two—three more turns, till the heavy window, suddenly bereft of its support, fell back with a creaking noise. I pressed hard against the side, expecting some movement from without; but listening eagerly and detecting

no sound, recommenced carefully to unscrew the port.

Favoured by the carelessness of the watchers, I soon had it open about half-an-inch, and getting a side glance along the deck, saw the cause of the ominous silence. The mutineers, having grown tired of beating the door, and taking the edge off their keen knives by sticking them into it, had thought of a better and safer way of battering down that obstacle. A little bit forward of where I stood our lifeboat was swung, and the heavy boom to which it had been lashed the mutineers had unshipped. This, under the direction of Li Chee, they now laid hold of with something of deadly earnest in their looks.

I guessed in a moment what it meant, and my heart gave a sickening, despairing sort of thump. The wretches, with their improvised battering-ram, were going to smash down the door ! I confessed my ingenuity was checked. I could not for the life of me see my next move. Hemmed in on either side, driven like a rat into that trap of a saloon, I knew the game was up. From Li Chee I might expect

but a short shrift. The Chinaman is a fiend when he has the blood in his eye, and the opportunity favours him. No torture is too cruel for him to practise, no anguish so great as to check his savagery. I admit I felt decidedly uncomfortable.

Just then, and while I yet vainly sought a solution to the problem, a shot rang out overhead, and my heart instantly formed the word "Craigiemore." The next moment a tingling sensation down my left side told me that I was hit. In my anxiety about the door I had entirely forgotten the small skylight. I looked up. A hideous grinning face and a smoking pistol met my view. It was no Craigiemore with his honest brown eyes, but one of Li's abandoned villains. Where the wretch had got the revolver I did not know; but luckily for me he was a bad shot, or the psychological moment was too much for his overstrung nerves. A tearing of the skin was luxury compared to a bullet in the ribs. Yet I had no great liking for the attempt, as I considered it showed a predisposition to evil.

But, quick as thought, I took sudden aim and fired. A savage growl followed and the

face was instantly withdrawn ; but the pistol went clattering down the stairs exploding as it fell. With it came the tip of a finger.

So this constituted a still heavier reckoning. I had drawn blood, and I knew that blood for blood would be the law. And the only consolation given me was the knowledge that I had been dragged into this horrible scrape through no fault of my own. Egad, once in it, it didn't much matter whose fault it was.

It behoved me now to make the best of my poor opportunities. I had still four shots left, and something might yet be done could I only make sure of bringing a man down with each shot. Four men, perhaps five, accounted for, and, for all the mutineers knew to the contrary, an unbounded supply of ammunition, must make them pause. I paused too, wondering if I had not better keep a last shot for reasons of my own. But fortunately I was always a practical sort of fellow, and, as I have said before, no fighting man ; but I think that even the mildest of non-combatants, when driven into a corner, will put up his hands. I will not

go so far as to say that the spirit of a thousand heroes leaped to my veins ; but I don't mind admitting that I indulged in a reckless flow of blood which was highly improper.

But during all this time preparations were going on without, except for the minute or so which followed the passage-at-arms between me and the man at the skylight. He had evidently clambered down among them, and was showing his bleeding hand, for after a little space the men broke out into fierce cries, and a dozen savage blows were showered upon the door, accompanied by sundry threats which, luckily, I did not understand. But I understood enough to know what I had to expect, and my stomach grew hard.

Presently Li's voice rose above the din, and the rat-tatting and cursing instantly ceased. A few seconds of suspense followed, and then the beam came bang against the door with an awful crash. At first I thought it had really come through, or that the door had given way, and I sprang down half-a-dozen of the companion steps as though the devil were at my heels ; as indeed he was, with a whole host of devils much blacker than himself. But

nothing of the kind had happened. The door still held and stoutly withstood half-a-dozen attempts all equally vigorous. But presently, as they hit lower at the panels, an ominous groaning followed, and then in came the daylight in cool white shafts. The besiegers yelled excitedly as they swung the beam to and fro : thump followed thump, and crash crash, till the whole structure gave way with a loud creak and a splashing of splinters.

I gripped the pistol in my right hand, and took a firm hold of the rail with the other. Four shots, and then ?—— I waited, grimly desperate. There was murder in my heart just then, which made me wish for a Maxim or a Gatling gun. At that moment, and without the slightest compunction, I could have slain every Chinaman beneath the sun.

Scarcely had the door fallen before half-a-dozen pig-eyed, yellow faces crowded into the entrance. I raised my pistol and shouted, "Keep back. I'll shoot the first man that enters."

Though they may not have understood my words, and I was not sure of any of them speaking English but Li, there was no mis-

taking my gesture or my meaning; and as I had already given them an instance of my determination, they drew back as one man. Then suddenly Li Chee spoke, and I knew by the tone of his voice that he was exhorting them onward. Lucky Li Chee, to stand outside and get others to face the music! I envied him, the sly fox, and wished I had a dozen pig-eyes to rush up and clear the decks for me.

As Li spoke, the mutineers pushed farther into the entrance, and one big ugly fellow sprang in on the mat, a knife in his hand, a most inhuman cry on his lips. Though it was only a matter of a second or so, I noticed his dirty blouse, his flying pigtail, and the eyes that shone almost as cruelly as the knife. The eyes I saw, and the savage look therein as I raised the revolver to his face and fired. He drew himself up straight as a soldier at salute, and seeming to look me fair in the face, flung his knife at me. I stooped; the weapon flew hissing over my head and stuck in the woodwork behind me. Then the man lurched heavily forward and shot head first down the companion way into the saloon.

His comrades looking on seemed stunned at the suddenness, the awful suddenness of his fate ; but seeing only one man holding the stair, they plucked up courage and made a sudden rush.

Snap, snap, snap ! went my pistol, the sudden furious shooting disconcerting them not a little. One of the two leaders, throwing up his arms, fell back among his companions, wildly clawing them and dragging two or three over with him ; the other, falling forward, rolled to the edge of the stairs, but as he came tumbling down he made a last ineffectual attempt to stick his knife in me.

I sprang after him and caught him savagely by the throat, but no violence was necessary, as the man was either stunned or dead. What I wanted was his knife, and this, which he still held in a firm grip, I soon wrenched from him. Then, without so much as turning round, I sprang to the foot of the stairs, with no other thought in my mind than to contest the way inch by inch. If the old man hadn't been such an awful coward, we two might have caused the enemy considerable inconvenience. As it was, I had emptied my

revolver, I had no reserve of ammunition, no one to fetch me any, and I was only one.

I admit to feeling precious queer as I stood at the bottom of that stair and gazed up at the scowling faces above me. The desperate game I was playing would have been all very well for a fire-eater, but for a man of peace it was extremely disconcerting. Still I ought in fairness to add that I didn't feel very peaceful as I watched the pig-eyes; nor could I have looked much like a man of peace with the long knife in one hand and the empty revolver in the other. Oh, if it were only charged! Gods! I believe I would have given twelve months' pay for half-a-dozen cartridges then.

I started and withdrew my hand hastily. Some one was touching it! My first thought was that one of the wounded Chinamen had crawled over and was trying his best to despatch me. Instantly my knife went up as I turned to strike; but as quickly it descended to my side, for the person so close to me was Mrs. Castle. She was dressed in white as usual—a white morning gown it looked like—her hair was coiled up loosely over her head: her face deadly white, but calm.

"Courage," she whispered, "courage."

As she spoke she pressed into my hands a revolver, the one, I afterwards learned, which the man at the skylight had let fall. Indeed, I guessed as much at the time.

"Is it loaded?" I whispered.

"Four chambers," she answered. "Courage."

I gripped her by the hand, still keeping my eyes on the doorway, and without speaking, pressed it warmly. She returned the pressure in a way that made me thrill. I noticed that her palm was quite cool as though her pulse beat regularly.

But things were evidently not going well with the enemy above. The unexpected resistance had taken a good deal of the courage out of them, and they now hung about the door in the most irresolute manner, glaring down at me, but never venturing to move. Not that they could not have overpowered me had they rushed me in a body; but such an act might be fraught with no little danger to some of them, and none seemed to have any inclination to court that danger. I didn't blame them. Anybody could have had my post for the asking.

The seconds hurried by, and yet the enemy made no movement, which inaction of theirs caused me the greatest anxiety. What was to be the next diabolical move in this diabolical game ?

Presently the voice of that arch-villain Li reached me.

“Mas'r Quenton.”

“Well ?”

“Me likee talkee talkee.”

“Well, what do you want to say ?”

“You no shootee ?”

“Not if you behave yourself.”

“Plomise ?”

“I promise.”

“You belong Englishyman,” said the beggar, laying on the soft soap. “Englishyman neber bleak 'im word ?”

“Never,” I answered stoutly.

There was a moment's consultation outside, and then Li appeared. Excitement had turned his face to a pale, dirty yellow, but it still wore the bland and winning smile I shall ever associate with him.

“Well,” said I boldly, knowing that nothing affects the ignorant mind so much as a brave

outward show, "this is a nice sort of business, isn't it?"

Li turned up his hideous little eyes, and seemed to ask Heaven's pardon for the outrage.

"Welly sad, Mas'r Quenton," he murmured sorrowfully, "too muchee welly dam sad."

The hypocrite! I knew that he was laughing at me, and felt as though I would like to jerk his queue. Then I wondered what sort of feeling he had for me.

"All very well," I said, "but you have gone too far, Mr. Li. Whether you know it or not, mutiny is a very serious matter."

He looked as though he could scarcely believe his ears. Mutiny a serious matter! Really these barbarians from Europe were too droll.

"You flighten me, Mas'r Quenton; you too muchee flighten this poor piecee Chinaman."

He was getting the better of me, and I felt as though I would like to make him smart for his sauce. A week ago he would hardly have dared to look impudent; now he plainly showed who he thought was master. I, however, ignored his irony. I could not admit, even to myself, that I had been jeered at by a chow.

"Have you any idea what this means when we reach Batavia?"

"Li no wantee leach Batavia. The *Colea* no leach Batavia either, if Li say she no leach."

"What do you mean by that?" I demanded in my most impressive voice, though I had a pretty fair notion.

"Suppose you sullender—me explain."

"No, thank you, Li. I am very comfortable here. Plenty pistol—plenty shoot. You sabbee?"

"Sabbee," said Li.

"Very well then. Don't talk any more nonsense about surrendering. If you are wise you will surrender to me before it is too late."

"Solly," he replied, "but no can sullender now. Clew too muchee angly; too muchee all 'ee same gone 'long. Suppose you no sullender, you no escape."

I believed him, though I had no intention of admitting as much.

"Very well," I answered; "but as I wouldn't like to hurt you, be sure you keep out of range. This pistol shoot plenty stlaight."

“Sabbee,” said Li thoughtfully, favouring me with an inquiring look. But as I made no attempt to pot him, he rapidly regained confidence. There is not much in which a Chinaman believes, though he can assume a belief with an excellent grace.

“Mas’r Quenton,” he said after a pause.

“Well?”

“Me no wantee cut your dam thloat.”

I told him it was very kind of him, and that I should esteem it a great favour if he would entirely banish the thought from his mind.

“But me must—suppose you no sullender. This ship cally seventy—eighty tousand dollar. Li wantee that dollar. Suppose you let Li ’ave that dollar, ’e allee same no cut your thloat: suppose you no let ’im ’ave that dollar, ’e slit your thloat sure, sabbee?”

I assured him that I had no particular wish to die, but that the captain had charged me to guard the stair, and that I meant to do it.

“Cap’n dlunken fool,” he cried disdainfully. “What for ’e no come allee same fightee? You belong blave man, Mas’r Quenton. Li no likee cut thloat of blave man. He welly solly, but ’e must ’ave dollar. Suppose you

lettee dollar go, Li leavee ship in boat and takee clew along o' 'im. Li no wantee ship, no wantee cut anybody's thloat : Li only wantee dollar."

I confess to being sorely tempted. What other hope was there for me, for those on board? The victory must go to the stronger, and Li was undoubtedly that. But could I trust him? A Chinaman's word is all very well when circumstances over which he has no control force him to keep it, and in that respect he is not much worse than any of his western brothers; but trusting to the word of a rascal like Li was an entirely different matter.

"Suppose I let you take the dollars, you swear that you will leave the ship, you and your crew, without molesting us, or in any way injuring the vessel?"

"Me swear," said Li, and again he raised his dirty little eyes to the skylight, taking the attitude of a medieval Chinese joss. "Me 'ave 'ad plenty fight. No likee too muchee shootee shootee."

I hesitated, thinking how best I could make myself secure while the rascals pillaged the strong-room; and then a silly quixotic fit

took hold of me, and an obstinacy, of which I feel ashamed, made me act like an idiot. I thought I was betraying my trust : that as the captain had left me in charge of the ship, I ought to fulfil that duty, even though I saw its utter futility. Nor was it any argument in my favour that the captain had basely deserted me and left me to cope with overwhelming odds. That was his affair ; mine was to obey orders and protect, as far as lay within me, the property of my employers.

“It can’t be, Li,” I answered. “My orders were to protect the ship, and I intend to obey them.”

“You lefuse !” cried he incredulously.

“Absolutely. If you want the dollars you must come and fetch ’em.”

Li’s even smile changed, and for a little while he looked very fierce and cruel.

“All li,” he said ; “you sabbee ?” With his long nail he drew an imaginary cut across his yellow throat.

“Sabbee,” I said, feeling a fool, but desperate.

“No, no,” cried Mrs. Castle, coming for-

ward for the first time. "Mr. Quenton, you cannot be so wicked!"

Wicked! I liked that. Foolish, perhaps—I was ready to admit as much; but wicked! I didn't fancy the word.

"Wicked, madam!" I echoed. Was it possible that I could not trust my own ears?

"Very wicked," she repeated. "You know what these men are; you know what our fate will be, and yet you wilfully court it."

"But," I stammered, "my orders—the captain——"

"The captain!" she echoed scornfully. "Do you know that he is lying at this moment dead drunk with fear and whisky? Why should you consider such a man?"

I stupidly mumbled something about my duty.

"Your duty is to save those who wish to be saved. Mr. Quenton, you are a brave man; you have even won the admiration of your enemy. You have done all that a brave man could do; but the odds are against you, and there can only be one result. I know you are not afraid to die, but oh, my God, I am. I don't want to die—I can't—I won't die!"

She flung herself at my feet, and seizing my hand pressed it convulsively to her lips, murmuring, "Save me, save me !"

"Please don't do that," I said. "I—I—" and there I broke down. This was a thousand times worse than Li with all his threats. At blows I might have played a fairly decent hand, but at this game I was nothing but a raw beginner. Li and his men watched me eagerly, the former smiling his inscrutable yellow smile, the latter all agape with wonder.

"You understand ?" I said as I caught his eye.

"Plenty. Missee Cap'n welly wise woman. Li no halm Missee Cap'n, no halm nobody. Li only wantee dollar."

Mrs. Castle had turned the tables on me with a vengeance, and though at the moment I felt a little foolish pique, I was glad enough after.

"It shall be as you wish," I mumbled ungraciously, addressing Li ; "but upon one condition."

"Twenty condition allee same me," he answered with a grin.

"You say you only want the dollars ?"

"Tlue."

“And that you will neither injure us nor the ship?”

“Tlue.”

“You know you can trust me?”

“Plenty tlust you.”

“Then come down into the saloon and sit with me till your men have cleared out the dollars.”

“Ah!” he gasped, seeing what I meant. He looked hard at me, at his men, and seemed to hesitate. Then he laughed and said, “All li; me plenty tlust you,” and without more ado he came fearlessly down the companion, albeit his face wore a somewhat uneasy grin. I did not let him get too close to me, but smiled a welcome and let him have a good look at my revolver.

“Now understand, Li,” I said, fixing him with a deadly earnest look. “Treat me fairly and we shall get along all right; but if you try any of your games I’ll shoot you.”

He grinned, looking about him anxiously.

“No game, Mas’r Quenton. Only want dollar.”

“Very well. Now, Mrs. Castle, will you get the key of the strong-room?”

She at once made her way to the cabin, returning almost immediately with the key.

This I told her to place on the lowest step of the companion way, which having done, she drew back behind me.

"Now, Li, there's the key, and that door yonder is the room. But first, sit there ;" and I made him sit opposite me where I had him well under my eye. The position also gave me command of the companion. "You sabee ?"

"Sabbee," he answered sullenly.

"Then call down your men."

He shouted out something in a high key, and immediately there was a clatter of naked feet on the stairway. As the men tumbled into the saloon and saw us sitting there like a pair of old friends, the look of wonder in their faces was almost amusing.

But Li, speaking in his most authoritative tone, soon had them at work. The dollars had all been packed in little iron-bound cases, and these the men quickly cleared out of the strong-room and bore aloft to the deck, Li keeping a loud tally as each one passed. The mutineers next broke into the store-room and

sent up enough provisions to last the ship's company for a week. And all the while I was forced to sit still and watch the robbery, though my blood fairly tumbled with rage. Devoutly I wished that Li would give me a half-excuse to shoot him, no matter what the consequence. But that worthy seemed quite satisfied with the arrangement, nor had he the least intention of giving me a chance to perforate his hide. Things were going along very pleasantly. Indeed I harboured the half-belief that he was inwardly congratulating himself upon getting off so cheaply.

Mrs. Castle stood behind me clutching the rail that ran from end to end of the saloon. No sound escaped her, not even so much as a little sigh or a hard breath. Catching an occasional glimpse of her, I saw that she was very pale, and that her big eyes had grown bigger ; but she uttered no word, and though hopeless as she must have felt, I was sure she possessed courage enough for even a greater ordeal.

CHAPTER VIII

I AM OVERWHELMED WITH GRATITUDE

AT last everything being got out from below, Li looked towards me, smiled, and nodded approvingly.

"All leady now," he said. "Me go top side."

He rose as he spoke, I immediately following his example. What if the beggar, having got the cash, refused to keep his word?

"Top side welly good," I replied.

He sprang to the companion, I following at his heels, though I doubt now if he had any thought of treachery. Still, I was not to know. At any rate, I meant to take it out of him.

On deck the boxes of specie were piled up against the starboard rail, while on the top of them sat grim-looking fellows with long ugly knives, knives and the men seeming

extremely well matched. Here and there the provisions were scattered about in the most shocking disorder, and had it not been for the generalship of Li, inextricable confusion must have resulted. With his appearance on the scene, things underwent an immediate change. Taking his stand beside the specie, he shouted out his orders like a man who knows what he wants, and means to get it done. I couldn't help admiring him, ragged rascal that he was, and contrasting him with Captain Castle.

As he shouted the men ran hither and thither, quickly restoring order out of chaos. The provisions were first equally divided, then the boxes of specie; and while one body of men began to load and provision the starboard boat, another provisioned the port.

Seeing that Li had really meant what he said, I now stood away back by the after wheel-house, Mrs. Castle by my side, and watched the whole proceeding with a variety of emotions. What her feelings were it might be difficult to say; but whenever I stole a glimpse at her, which I did occasionally, I

thought her face looked almost triumphant. But that might only have been my fancy, for the glances I got of her were but momentary ones stolen when I thought she wasn't looking.

At last specie and provisions being duly stowed away, the men began to lower both boats at the same time, which, as the sea was still smooth, was a comparatively easy task. The boats swung lightly on the water, a man at either end easily keeping them from bumping against the ship's sides. Then the order being given, the mutineers, who had stood by a grinning, gibbering crowd, swung themselves over the side like so many cats, and in various ways succeeded in getting into the boats, though not before some of them had got a wet jacket.

I breathed easier as the last dirty face went over the side, and walking forward returned Li's salute as that worthy pushed off. Near him in the stern were half-a-dozen of his close companions, while the others crowded forward and amidships, the latter sadly hampering the men who were trying to step the mast. Li was sitting high up on a box

of specie, and as I leaned over the side he waved his hand gaily and favoured me with an extraordinary grin.

“Good-bye, Quenton,” he shouted, grinning greatly at his own familiarity. “Li welly solly ’e ’ave to take both boats; but clew too muchee big for one, dollar too muchee ’eavy.”

“Look out they don’t sink you,” I cried; “though better that than Singapore or Samarang.” With my hand I drew an imaginary noose round my neck, and then a straight line upwards. Li understood and laughed.

“No’ likee Singlaplore,” he said; “no can pidgin to Samalang. Find nicee place, makee land.”

I don’t believe the fool had any idea where he was; but I pitied him and his crew if the south-west monsoon caught them in the open sea. However, he seemed as anxious to get away from the ship as I was to see him go, and calling to his men he made them lay on their oars with a good will. Some five hundred yards or so astern the two boats met. A council of war followed, the result of which was that the boats put about and steered due

west. Li knew something of his whereabouts after all.

"Well," said I, turning to my companion, who once more had stolen to my side and was watching the distant boats with eager eyes, "what do you think? Have we come out of this well or ill?"

"You have come out of it gloriously," was the somewhat unexpected reply.

Being but a modest man, and quite unused to anything in the way of a compliment, I blushed most painfully. Nor did the sudden flush of colour to her cheek, nor the quick sparkle of her eye, reassure me. It is very nice to know that people speak well of you, but to have such splendid things thrown bang in your face is decidedly disconcerting. I thought I might be safer if I altered my course a point or two.

"I don't think you need be so severe," I protested. "I did my best for everybody's sake."

She came very close to me and laid her hand on my arm.

"Good heavens! Mr. Quenton, you don't think that I am insincere?"

I tried to brazen it out, but I simply couldn't look into her eyes. They were burning, and they set me burning, and I didn't want to burn just then. Besides, I was only a man, and perhaps not the best man that ever trod a ship's deck.

"Of course you are very kind," I mumbled, like the great dunderhead I was, "but being a woman, you are over-generous. What do you think Captain Castle will say when he hears of my surrender?"

"Nothing."

I smiled, but I let her see that I was not of her way of thinking.

"He dare not," she added, "he dare not, after his own behaviour."

I still held a contrary opinion, which was just like my boorishness. What right had I even to think No, when she said Yes? Yet, come what might, or be I ever so ungallant, I felt convinced that I had a sturdy advocate in the captain's wife.

Begging her to excuse me, I then hurried forward to the bridge, in the port corner of which, made fast to one of the stanchions, I beheld the mate. His back was to me,

but I could see by the way he was lashed that he must have suffered much agony. His huge red neck was twice its ordinary size, and seemed close upon bursting. As I got on a level with him I saw that his eyes were closed, and that a gag had been stuffed in his mouth. Thinking he had fainted, my first action was to remove the gag, which proved to be a piece of oily, dirty waste from the engine-room—the revenge, no doubt, of some fireman or greaser whom the mate had kicked and cuffed in the hour of his might.

As I removed this most obnoxious gag, Minton opened his eyes in a dreamy, far-away manner; and then suddenly seeming to realise that his lips were free, he began to expectorate in the most noisy and vulgar fashion, to the accompaniment of which nice music I quickly undid his bonds. For quite a minute I had to steady him while his blood began to circulate, and all the while he kept up an incessant kicking and spitting. When at last he had regained his blood and his breath, he turned his ugly little eyes inquiringly upon me.

"I feel dashed funny, Quenton : what's happened ?"

I told him.

"Phew !" he said. "I recollect. The beggars took me by surprise, and one of those filthy greasers jammed his dirty waste in my mouth, the swine ! So they're gone, you say ? Why the blazes didn't you stop 'em ?"

"Why didn't you ?"

"If I'd been free I would ;" and he swore a mighty oath to it.

"Well, I was glad to see them go."

"I daresay. You would be," he added meaningly.

"Unfortunately I am not a hero like you."

"Pah !"

Shading his eyes he looked away to the westward, where the boats were still distinctly to be seen.

"That's them out yonder ?"

"Yes."

He looked long and then turned to me with another brave oath.

"Um," he snarled, "and both bally boats

too. You've made a pretty mess of it. Egad, they'd have found me a different cuss to tackle. Where's the old man?"

"Below."

"What does he say?"

"He hasn't said anything."

He favoured me with an inquiring look.

"What d'ye mean?"

"Can't you guess?"

"He's dead?"

"Yes—dead drunk."

"Look here," said Minton, "you're a bit too free with your tongue. I should think it had got you into enough trouble already. Take my advice and belay. Thank your stars I'm not a talebearer. I've seen smarter men than you come to grief over the same thing, and it's that way you're steering."

"A sort of Macclesfield Bank in the China Sea of my destiny?"

"Well," he growled, "I warn you, that's all. You can take it or leave it. You're very clever, I know, but it's a very funny thing that you should be the only man whom they did not entrap."

I didn't relish the tone in which this was

said, but I made due allowance for the greasy rag which had oiled his tongue.

"I am the only one who showed the ordinary intelligence of a country policeman. When I told you what was brewing, you only laughed at me."

"And how did you know it was brewing?" he asked suspiciously.

"Any man who keeps a good look-out can see a squall before it strikes the ship."

"Oh, I know you're a smarty," he mumbled ungraciously. "I only hope the old man will take your view." But the tone belied the words.

The engineers were even in a worse plight than the mate, being all bound and thrown into the stokehole; and when at length I freed them, the air resounded with some singular Scotch oaths. Craigiemore told me how it was done, how he was felled with a shovel and pounced upon before he could offer any resistance: how they were all laid in front of the furnace and threatened with burning and tortures of the cruellest description, the wretches even going so far as to kindle the furnace for that purpose.

Indeed, had not Li and I come to terms, there is no knowing what would have befallen them. Craigiemore gripped my hand as with a few brief words I let him know my share of the transaction. He didn't say anything, this Scot, but I saw a light in his eyes that made me feel glad: felt his honest grip shoot right through me. Such a grip from a man who feared no one but God was worth a good deal to me just then.

My next duty was to liberate the Chinese bos'un, Ji Ji, he out of all the native crew being the only one to remain loyal. As I made my way forward to his quarters I became possessed of an extreme feeling of uneasiness. I feared his loyalty to us might be attended with the gravest consequence, for where they might have hesitated to ill-treat us, I knew they would show no mercy to one of their own blood.

The door of his cabin was locked, the key missing. I knocked loudly and called "Ji, Ji;" but though I put my ear to the keyhole I could catch nothing. Once I thought the sound of a low gurgle, as

though some one was trying hard to breathe, reached me; but hearing no more, I immediately put it down to my imagination, which at such a time was naturally a little active. However, the worst must be known. I shot out my foot and sent the lock flying.

Poor old Ji Ji was lying in his bunk, bound and gagged, a great clot of congealed blood on the side of his face: but I saw with pleasure his eyes move as I entered. It did not take me long to set him free, and though for a short time he appeared quite dazed, he was not long before he sat up of his own accord. Then I saw that he had bled profusely from a severe wound below the temple, which I afterwards learned was given him in the struggle that followed his surprise.

I led him up on deck and there left him slowly to recover, though I first ran down to my room and brought him up a little whisky and water. The poor chap quaffed the liquor greedily, and though he sat almost sullenly mute, which I think was owing to the dazed condition of his brain, his pained, pathetic eyes never left my face for a moment.

About eight o'clock that night, as I sat forward with Craigiemore smoking and chatting about our late experiences—for we were now entirely at the mercy of the sea and could do nothing to help ourselves—the mate ambled towards us, and with an insinuating smile informed me that the captain was anxiously awaiting me aft. Then he stood grinning horribly, this satyr of a man, as though he wished me to question him ; but I would not give him the satisfaction of appearing curious. I could imagine too easily the pleasure he would derive from his answers.

Slowly I arose, and with charming non-chalance knocked the ashes from my pipe. It seemed a magnificent thing to keep Cæsar waiting, though, truth to tell, I anticipated nothing pleasant from the interview.

“Now then, smarty,” cried the gorilla facetiously, “belay there, or you'll be slipping out of your skin. The old man's not in a hurry, not in the least. He doesn't believe in hurrying. He says it's bad form.”

He grinned knowingly at Craigiemore, but if he expected an answering grin from that quarter he was mistaken. The Scot stared him

stolidly in the face with a look of blank contempt. The mate turned away with a scowl.

I followed him aft where the captain and little Campbell, the chief engineer, sat. The old man was in his wife's long cane chair, and as I approached him I thought he looked more fit for the sick-room than the chair of authority. His cheeks were of a dreadful ashen yellow, his eyes glazed and thickly clotted with veins. As he stroked his long yellow moustache his hand visibly trembled.

There was little love in the look he turned on me, and not one gleam of gratitude. I felt, though I struggled hard with the feeling, as though I had been guilty of some fearful breach of duty.

"I want to talk to you," he began abruptly. "It's a curious fact, but I seem to spend most of my time talking to you."

"Verra curious," muttered the engineer.

I thought of something else he spent a good deal of time over, and with less profit to himself; but I refrained from mentioning it, wishing to return good for evil.

"Will you be good enough to give me your version of this affair?"

Resenting the tone, I said, "From the time you left me, promising to return?"

The dark blood leaped to his yellow face: anger burned ominously in his thick eyes. He waved impatiently for me to begin.

In as few words as possible I told him all, explaining my reasons for what I did; the chief of which was the utter impossibility of holding out with success.

"And yet you say you were armed: had actually four shots in your revolver?"

I admitted as much, but rather sullenly, for I could see how the land lay, and knew there was neither honesty nor justice in the man. Moreover, I guessed that this examination was held merely to pick holes in my coat.

"It seems to me," he said coldly, his impudence being really sublime, "that you might easily have shown to better advantage. But I suppose that skin of yours is too tender to be touched?"

The mate laughed pleasantly: the little greased rag of an engineer turned up his watery blue eyes and murmured that it was a peety that such an apparently fine young man should be so verra much to blame.

"What, sir, would you have done in my case?" said I, addressing the captain.

"Stuck to my post," said he, "stuck to my post as I was bidden, and shot the mutinous dogs rather than disobey orders."

"With four cartridges?"

"At any rate, I would have used up those four cartridges."

"If I had, you would be a dead man now—and you—and you," I added, turning to the mate and the engineer.

"Better that," said the hero, "than the shame of this."

"Much better," echoed the mate.

"Oh, the peety of it!" murmured the engineer.

"I am sorry, but I cannot agree with you. Yet had I known the true state of your feelings I might have been tempted to consider them. For myself, I had no wish to die. I even preferred life on the *Corea*."

"But even life on the *Corea* may not always be a bed of roses," said he, ill concealing the effect of my words: "at least, not for the disobedient officer. I must say you do not seek to allay suspicion."

"Suspicion?" I asked, for though my indignation almost stifled me, I would not give him or them the satisfaction of seeing it.

"Well," he said, "I don't know how it appears to you, though judging by your record I can make a shrewd guess; but to the unbiassed mind it looks pretty much like a job."

The mate shook his big head and wagged his eyelids thoughtfully.

"Comes of mixing with the engineers," he blurted out.

"The junior engineers," said Campbell, correcting him. The captain smiled languidly.

"A job!" I stammered, for of all the cruel things he had said to me this was the cruellest. "Do you mean——"

"I mean exactly what I say: the business looks bad—for you. I'm not sure that I oughtn't to place you under arrest."

Fairly bewildered, I looked from one to the other, not knowing what to make of this sudden turn of affairs. That he had power to do it too was certain, but that he was so bad I could not believe; though I knew

something of what he was, and guessed what he might be.

“As you please,” I said. “I am not the one who need shirk an inquiry.”

He understood well enough. Yet when he tried to laugh, he showed his teeth as I have seen a terrier do a score of times.

“At all events, you will admit that you are the only one who knew anything of their intention to mutiny. How came it that you should guess the existence of a plot of which we had no suspicion?”

“That is a question for you to decide. I told the mate of my suspicions, and he laughed. I told you, and you insulted me.”

“And yet is it not strange that these mutineers, who, according to your own showing, were masters of the ship, should go off without molesting you, though you were the one who caused so much confusion in their ranks?”

“I have told you the whole truth, sir. I have nothing more to say.”

“But I have,” said a voice, and out from the side of the deck-house stepped Mrs. Castle. Her usually pale face showed a beautiful

glow, a glow of intense indignation, while her fine dark eyes flashed with no ordinary light.

“You !” cried her husband angrily.

“Yes, I. I have listened till I could listen no longer to your horrible suggestions. You know perfectly well that Mr. Quenton did all that a brave man could do, and that but for him we should all be lying dead at the bottom of the sea.”

“Really,” sneered Castle, “Mr. Quenton is fortunate in his advocate. But I am not aware that I require you. Will you kindly go below ?”

“No, I will not.”

“Humph !” he cried affectedly, “more mutiny ! Minton, what do you make of this ?”

The mate smiled and looked exceedingly sheepish ; but there was a devil, or something just as bad, in the pale eyes of the engineer. He watched the woman in a way that brought a deeper flush to her face.

“Mistress Castle,” he said in his slow, drawling, Scotch way, a way that made the northern dialect sound hideous in southern

ears, "ye are a bonnie bit o' bride, but ye dinna ken the deefficulty under which ye're guid man labours."

"I know," said she, "all that I wish to know. Moreover, sir, if you had any feeling of gratitude in you, you would go down on your knees to Mr. Quenton and thank him for what he has done."

"I have promised mysel' that treat," he answered with a sneer; "but I have no yet recovered the use o' me knees. Bide a wee, Mistress Castle. Ye wadna ha' me rush the thing without due conseederation?"

She turned from him in disgust and her eyes met mine: the softness came back to her face; her eyes grew marvellously soft. "We are friends," she seemed to say: "in danger we have stood beside each other. We understand each other, you and I. Come, is it not so?" And I could only murmur to myself, "Yes, yes."

CHAPTER IX

THE CAPTAIN DOES SOME SHOOTING

IT might be difficult to say what would have happened but for her intervention. I was in no mood to bear uncomplainingly the captain's brutal insinuations, while he and his friends were ready to press me to the hilt. Though a peaceful man, I was not Christian enough to endure without demur such a piece of gross injustice. I admit I thought it very bad payment. Though I had not entirely succeeded, I still considered that I had capitulated with no little honour, and that my reward should have been anything but what it was. Nor was it either wise or gracious of him to taunt and jeer at me now that all danger was over; for though I still possessed all that regard for him which one is bound to feel for one's superior officer, I might none the less have forgotten myself.

But her appearance and her uncompromising style of talk acted so much in my favour that the captain immediately motioned for me to withdraw, saying he would speak with me later on. I accordingly went forward, glad to shut out the sight of the hateful three, and glad that I had not let my tongue run away with my prudence.

All the rest of that day, and through the whole of the following night, we rolled helplessly on the greasy sea. No attempt was made to remend the shaft, the last break being one which rendered the task impossible. So backwards and forwards we rolled with a low groaning sound, occasionally forcing an oily wave from the side, which, forming as it ran, burst some yards away, a gleaming row of white teeth in the green lips of the sea. The ship carried two sticks of masts, upon which a couple of sails might once have been set; but sails were of no use now, and even had the wind favoured us I doubt if our spread of canvas would have sent us along more than a knot an hour. Our only hope was that we might fall in with some steamer which would tow us into port; failing that, there was no

knowing where we should drift, or what would become of us. I feared myself that we were already far out of the track of steamers, and that each hour the tide was carrying us farther to the eastward. If so, our chance of falling in with a coaster grew more and more remote ; nor are the junks that frequent these byways of the ocean at all times the most desirable of visitors.

Towards morning a slight breeze sprang up from the south, which by eight o'clock had increased to a strong wind. This, gradually veering round to the west, set in a steady blow, and we knew that the south-west monsoon had come at last, or if not exactly the monsoon, one of its forerunners. The sea rose instantly, and in an hour or so the white racing waves rushed helter-skelter over the green sea. The *Corea* rolled from side to side as helpless as a great boiler ; the waves smacked her fore and aft till she shook with the smacking. Her decks ran water : splashed with spray, she glistened from stem to stern. A hundred times she rolled so far over that I thought she would never right herself. As I stood in the lee corner of the bridge I saw

the water hiss beneath my feet, and I murmured a hurried prayer. At such moments one grows very good, and wonders if there is a heaven. There is death, certainly—palpable, staring death—and that is enough to give a sinner qualms. But no, she is not going over this time. With a bob of her nose and a shiver that makes every plate tremble, the old boat shakes herself free, and rising hurls the wave back right in the face of the gale, where it breaks with a hiss and a roar.

All through that day the sea raged furiously, and when night came, black, squally, and threatening, I did not believe that we should live it through. I really did not see how the old tub could keep herself afloat much longer. One of these times she would roll so far as to defy all laws of balance or gravitation. The sea is but a treacherous prop at best, and one big wave following out of order would do the trick. Yet it was singular how methodically, almost mechanically, everything worked. Wave followed wave, thud thud, and wash wash, with the regularity of clockwork. Now she swayed to starboard, now to port; now she stood upright for a few seconds, and

thrilled like a young thing who is not accustomed to such rough kissing ; which was only her coy, skittish way, for she was really an old hand at the game. Then came a ponderous thud ; a wild swirling of water followed, and backwards and forwards she swung with little dignity and no ease. I knew exactly how many times she would swing to port, how many to starboard, and during my watch below that night I sent myself to sleep merely by counting her movements.

When I went up on deck at eight bells, the night was still dark, the wind howled angrily, and the rain descended in torrents. The noble old packet still rolled, and groaned, and strained as if she would split herself ; but though she tried her best, that destiny which watches over drunkards and fools safeguarded her always.

Slowly out of the east the dawn began to break, and a difficult task it must have been to break in the teeth of such a gale. The mate was more than half-an-hour late in coming to relieve me, which was another little way he had of showing his brotherly love.

You may be sure that there was very little doing aboard of us while this elemental hulla-baloo went on. Those hours I was not forced to spend on deck I kept religiously in my cabin, with Craigiemore as my only companion and the worthy Ji Ji in attendance. He, poor fellow, now that his crew were gone, wandered aimlessly about, the most miserable of Chinamen, till I called him in to make tea for me and generally mess about. The quarters forward were very lonely now that all the men had gone, and I'm inclined to believe that Ji was half-afraid during the long awful night.

At noon there was no cessation of the storm, but by this time we had almost got used to it. It was now evident that unless the gale increased to a hurricane the *Corea* would ride it safely; for after last night's knocking about there could be no longer any question of her sea-worthiness.

As usual I relieved the third at noon. The sky was still black and lowering, and at intervals thick rain-squalls came shrieking across the sea. The glass betokened a continuance of stormy weather, and sometimes

I thought the wind was almost increasing in fury. As for help, no steamer could have come near us then even had we sighted one.

Just about six bells, one of those periodic squalls of which I have spoken rushed down and struck us with terrific force. The ship seemed to spin round as on a pivot ; then of a sudden she buried her lee rail so far in the water that I seemed to lean right out over the sea. I clung to the stanchion with all my might ; but for the moment I thought my time had come.

For fully two minutes this dreadful squall roared and hissed and shrieked about us, the rain coming down in such torrents that, had I not clung tightly, I believe it would have washed me off the bridge. Then when it passed away the sky grew clearer, and the sun made sundry ineffectual efforts to shine. Deeply interested, I watched him for a time, and then with an ironical smile turned to contemplate the stormy quarter.

The late squall, which was now dying away to the eastward, had considerably cleared the western horizon ; and as I gazed in that direction I thought I saw something unusual tossing

upon the waves. A closer scrutiny assured me that I was right, and on getting out my glasses I distinctly made out a ship's boat. In five minutes more I saw her mast, to which fluttered a rag of a sail. I also thought I could see the dark forms of people crouching low in her. But of this I would not like to swear.

Without more ado I made my way aft, for the old man had given orders that he was to be called if anything was seen. It was the usual order given in the usual off-hand way ; for though he hated me to come near him, he had to make a pretence of doing things in the proper style. It also contained an under-meaning which was not flattering to a competent officer.

As I opened the door of the deck-house, the smell of tobacco smoke and the sound of merry voices reached me. Pausing half-way down the companion, I heard the captain say, "There you are, you damned monkey, there's the whisky. See that you don't choke yourself with it."

The mate laughed and said something in a low guttural voice.

There was silence for a moment or two : a

significant silence. Then the captain cried again, his voice having a merry, friendly ring in it, "Now then, you baboon, tune up and tip us a stave."

"Ay, Meenton," came the whining voice of the chief engineer, "let us hae ane o' your decent, ceevil sailor songs."

"No, Scotchie, it's your turn," replied the mate.

"Come, come, Minton, no rot," exclaimed the old man irritably. "Give us a chanty."

The mate guffawed loudly: then he was silent awhile. I guessed that he was oiling up. The next moment he burst forth into the following well-known chanty, giving it with the proper fo'c'sle drawl:—

"Oh, whisky hot and whisky cold,
Whisky, Johnnie!
Oh, whisky's good for young and old,
Whisky for my Johnnie!"

The captain and the engineer bellowed the chorus, "Whisky, Johnnie!" with a right goodwill, the hoarse voices of the men contrasting strangely with the hoarse roaring of the wind. I also thought their tones proclaimed a generous appreciation of that popular fluid.

The soloist continued :—

“ Oh, whisky killed my poor old dad,
Whisky, Johnnie !
And whisky drove my mother mad,
Whisky for my Johnnie ! ”

How often had I sung this same chanty in my apprentice days as we laid on to the top-sail halliards ! Then it seemed a rollicking, harmless sort of song, and acted as a great incentive to work ; for with every “ Whisky, Johnnie ! ” the men gave two stout pulls. A chanty always put the hands in a good humour, no matter how dirty the night or how heavy the labour. But as it came reeking up from the saloon that day it sent a shudder of disgust right through me.

Without giving the mate a chance of further displaying his vocal abilities, or of giving an exhibition of his marvellous memory—for your ordinary sea chanty goes on for ever like a Chinese poem—I at once descended into the midst of this jovial company.

At the head of the table, in his own particular arm-chair, sat the captain : on his right was the mate, on his left the engineer. They were all smoking, and each held a

tumbler in his hand, the rolling of the ship preventing the aforesaid tumblers from being placed on the table. In the swinging rack above them were a couple of suspicious-looking black bottles.

The old man stared savagely across at me as I stood near the bottom of the companion.

"You !" he thundered.

That exclamation meant much, a meaning to which the contemptuous tone of the voice added in a singularly distasteful manner. I was the detested skeleton at the feast. Alas, I knew it ; but duty is duty.

"There's a boat about five miles away to the windward," I said.

"A what ?" he roared.

Thinking the whisky might have got into his ears, though he was too old a hand to pour it in that way, I advanced three or four paces and bellowed, "A boat, sir."

"Damn you, I'm not deaf."

I turned without more ado and ascended to the deck. Acting with my usual discretion, I thought it better to avoid all unseemliness ; for I had no wish to see my captain do anything derogatory to his dignity, well knowing

that the junior officer reflects the lustre of his superior. Moreover, I could see that he was in a nasty mood—one of his “yellow moods,” Craigiemore called them—when face and moustache took unto themselves a dull bilious yellow. At such times, if you were not entirely lacking in wisdom, you would give Captain Castle a wide berth. As I think I said before, I am very cautious where my own skin is concerned.

It was rather a journey to get to the bridge with the big seas slopping over us and the decks as slippery as glass; but, waiting my opportunity, I satisfactorily accomplished the passage. Then I found that the boat was approaching us with inconceivable rapidity, impelled onward by the wind and sea. Again I fixed my glasses on it, and this time I felt sure that the boat was familiar. Indeed, as I swept the seas a little to the right of it, I saw its mate—our other boat. The presence of the one explained the presence of the other. Overtaken by the strong south-westerly gale, the mutineers had no option but to 'bout ship and run before it, which, by a strange freak of fortune, had driven them straight back to

their starting-point. By what I could make out, both seemed to be in much the same plight, though both had out oars and were making straight for us.

Five—ten minutes passed, and as yet the captain had not appeared. I began nervously to fidget. In a little while now the foremost boat would be upon us, and what was I to do?—drive her off with a curse, or fling her a rope? True I knew Castle didn't want the mutineers aboard, but all the same aboard they must come if left to me.

But fortunately for my peace of mind the captain and his two companions now appeared, and taking up a secure position well aft, watched with evident interest the boat draw near. Craigiemore, stealing an occasional glimpse to windward, sheltered himself behind the funnel; while Ji Ji, smothered in oilskins, dared the fury of the waves, so keen was his interest in the matter.

I was surprised that no movement came from the captain, that even the mate failed to yell out in his melodious voice, "Stand by there with a rope." Was nothing to be done?

or what was going to be done? I did in no case expect that which followed.

But in the meantime the boat continued rapidly to advance, and when about five hundred yards off, her crew hailed us with multitudinous strange cries. They waved their hands in the air: some even took off their wet blouses and shook them with joy. They had evidently had quite enough of mutineering and life in a longboat, and were eager to surrender on any terms. When you have nothing between you and death but a frail shell of wood there is not much in piracy.

But no response came from the *Corea*. No doubt the castaways saw the little group aft, and me on the bridge, and they must have been sorely puzzled to know why no answer was made to their signals; but still on they came, regarding our helpless old tub as a sort of promised land.

As the boat came nearer I easily distinguished several members of the crew, and in a wretched plight they seemed. Some were busy baling; others were crouched low as if to escape the rude, stinging smacks of the

sea ; while at least half the number that went away in her had disappeared altogether.

Down on the wind she came at a great rate till I thought she would smash herself to pieces on our stem. But no : the steersman brought her sharp under our counter, and presently she was riding in comparatively smooth water. Then the sodden wretches set up a fearful howling, which they accompanied with wild gesticulations. I can even now hear the despairing cry of the poor wretch in the bows as he shrieked out, "A lope, cap'n, a lope!" But no rope was thrown him, no sign made by Castle or his companions. I could imagine the fierce yellow look, though, and the vengeful smile.

The men at the oars now set to with a will, for the boat was rapidly drifting out of the shelter of the ship, and had already touched the fringe of broken water. It was a stout pull, but they bent to their oars with the strength of desperation, and inch by inch forged their way forward. It was then I noticed that the bottom of the boat was full of water, and that the specie boxes were almost buried in it. I don't think there could

have been eight men left out of the sixteen or so who had put off in her. Whether the others had been swept overboard, or thrown, I of course could only surmise ; but the ship wanted lightening, and it would not have surprised me to know that the living ballast had been sacrificed.

As the boat drew near us the cries for assistance were redoubled, but as yet no movement had been made aft : the three men might have been so many carven blocks for all the sign of life they gave. Then as the boat nosed up alongside, the fellow in the bows, who had been doing most of the gesticulating and talking, made fast with a boat-hook, and began to speak earnestly to the captain. And still no aid was offered. What was the meaning of this awful inactivity ? what the intention ?

My blood grew hot and cold by turns, and in another moment I should have rushed aft and flung the wretches a rope, had not the action of the captain arrested my attention. I saw him slip his hand into his pocket, and then lean over the rail till he seemed almost to touch the man in the bows. What he said

I do not know, but I saw the look of terror in the man's face, saw him shrink back as though he would escape some sudden and unforeseen danger. Then followed a flash and a sharp report. The man threw up his arms with a shriek, and fell sideways into the sea.

I could scarcely believe my eyes, even when I saw the wreath of smoke start up from the captain's hand. Though I believed him guilty of any meanness or cowardice, I thought he would stop short at murder. When I handed over to him my pistol with its four chambers intact, I little thought he would put it to such a use.

The blood rushed to my head and drove me fairly mad with indignation, an indignation which might have found vent in something more than words had not a terrible thing happened just then. I have said that the boat was close up alongside. Well, for a moment or so after the captain fired, horror and stupefaction were writ large on the miserable faces of the mutineers, and they all cowered low in the boat, as though they had no wish to encounter that awful man. At

that very moment a gigantic wave struck us a thundering blow amidships, and with such force that it drove us clean over on our beam ends. Whether we touched the boat or not I cannot say, for I had to cling like death to save myself from going overboard; but as the big wave passed under us it caught the boat in its crest, swung it round like a cork, and then upset it.

The sight that followed was horrible beyond all comprehension. Precipitated into the water in this sudden and awful manner, the spluttering, agonised shrieks that followed were such as I hope I may never hear again. Very few of the men seemed able to swim, while those who could appeared either to be paralysed with terror or powerless in the grip of such a sea. They made but a feeble fight with the waves—all but one, the man who had been steering, the fellow who had acted as bo'sun's mate to Ji Ji. Not alone was he a powerful swimmer, but, what was almost as good, he kept his head. The water evidently had no terrors for him, though I could see by the look he cast towards us that the ship had.

Having found this fellow a fairly good man, I had taken a certain amount of interest in him, though that interest had considerably lessened since he took sides with the mutineers. Still, I remembered what he had been, and when I saw him struggling there with death, I made up my mind to help him. As at that moment he happened to look my way I beckoned for him to approach. He waved his hand, and then turning on his side, came along in good style.

In each end of the bridge was a lifebuoy, and seizing the one near me I darted down the steps with the intention of making it fast to a line and flinging it over to him. But while I was engaged in this humane intention another shot suddenly rang out, and on looking along the deck I saw that the old man had been at his devil's practice again. I was almost afraid to look into the sea, but when I did I saw the bo'sun's mate carried away to leeward on the top of a big wave. He was lying on his back, his eyes wide open, his face set in a ghastly grin.

At that moment the other boat came sweeping round our stern, the redoubtable Li Chee

at the tiller. He must have seen this last act of the captain's, for his face was awful to behold as he shook his fist at the little group aft. Castle replied with two shots in quick succession, and then finding he had missed, he savagely flung his revolver into the sea. Li laughed and waved his hand, but this time there was a bare knife in it. He, however, made no attempt to board us. The sea, cruel as it was, was safer than the *Corea* with Captain Castle aboard.

I watched the boat disappear amid the great seas, a feeling of heaviness at my heart. How could we, who had shown ourselves so merciless, expect that God would show us mercy?

CHAPTER X

IN IRONS

ALL through that night the storm blew with great vehemence, but towards morning the wind dropped and the sun rose with every prospect of a brighter day. In a few hours at most the sea would go down, when life on board might once more be endurable. After living so long in constant terror of a speedy and unpleasant termination to one's existence, the prospect of a smooth sea, and a steady, if useless ship, was one to which the heart looked forward with the most pleasurable anticipations.

I know I turned in that morning with some such grateful feeling, notwithstanding the ever-present picture of the awful doings of yesterday. But about five bells, or half-past six, I was awakened from a sound sleep through experiencing some very rough usage. Some

one had seized me firmly by the wrists, so firmly indeed that for the moment I was not sure whether I was waking or dreaming. I tried to sit up, but a heavy hand held me back, a huge red hand covered with long fair hair. There was only one such hand in the world, or I had only seen one.

“Keep still, can’t you?” growled the mate.
“It’s useless to attempt any hanky-panky.”

I tried to raise my hands, but they seemed chained together. I looked at them. I was in irons.

Minton smiled grimly as he read the wonder, the surprise of my look.

“Captain’s orders,” he said shortly.

“What for?”

“You’d better ask him.”

“Where is he?”

“Gone below. He’ll be up again in an hour or two.”

“I suppose you have no suspicion?”

The monster smiled and rubbed his horrid snub nose.

“That’s just it—suspicion. The old man don’t know how to take you.”

“But you do.”

He smiled in a superior sort of way, but continued, “You see, you’ve crossed him so often that he thinks you’ll be safer under lock and key.”

“So that he may murder with impunity?”

“Rubbish! Those fellows were pirates. They would have done for us if we had allowed them to come aboard. The captain was justified in self-defence. And if he wasn’t, he did it all the same.”

“Might is evidently right with Captain Castle,” and I held up my manacled hands.

He grinned. “Might is right with everybody.”

“Still it’s poor payment for what he owes me—what you all owe me.”

“Ah, that’s just it—what do we owe you?” There was an insinuating tone about the man that did not please me.

“Ask Li Chee, when you see him: ask the captain’s wife.”

“Pooh!” he sneered, “the captain’s wife is not the woman who would influence me. I think she too has been taught a lesson.”

I looked up anxiously. “How?”

He laughed his horrid, tantalising, baboon laugh.

"Perhaps for the future she'll keep her opinions to herself."

I asked for a fuller explanation, but the man was obdurate. He only added mysteriously, "The person who crosses Captain Castle will live to regret it."

In a way I believed he was right. Some queer things might be done on the *Corea* without the outside world being a penny the wiser.

Turning to my own case I asked him how long I might expect to suffer the disgrace of confinement.

"Your sentence is no fixed term," he said. "You are simply detained during his majesty's pleasure."

Though positively seething with rage, I kept an outward appearance of calm, and apparently bore my misfortune with philosophical indifference. I don't suppose I deceived the mate overmuch ; but when he was gone, and the door locked upon me, I threw myself back in my bunk and ineffectually tried to deceive myself. It seemed a bad

return for what I had done, and at intervals I found myself wishing that I had done nothing at all. But not for long. Captain Castle hated me with an unreasoning hatred : suspicion would presently turn to open accusation. All this I guessed, and yet I tried to look beyond him into a clearer, wider sea.

It was with much concern that I saw the hours slip by, for as yet no one had brought me either food or drink, and I was feeling abominably hungry and thirsty. I got up and rapped and kicked at the door : I shouted myself hoarse, but all to no purpose. No one heard me, or if I was heard no one heeded me. The air of my cabin grew stifflingly close, and even when, after much difficulty, I succeeded in opening the port, I enjoyed little benefit therefrom ; for my room was on the lee side of the vessel, and the wind had died away to a gentle breeze.

It was now a gloriously fine day. The sea had gone down as though in haste to rest, and I could see the sun glinting brightly on the water. But in my cabin the stuffiness became unendurable : the perspiration oozed out of

me like a thick dew. With my watch in my hand I counted the minutes as they slipped into hours, and presently dinner-time came and passed. I listened eagerly, but no one approached to turn the key in the lock. Fortunately I had about half a pint of water in my water-jug, and with this I managed to sustain life throughout that trying day.

I think I must have dozed for a couple of hours that afternoon, for when I awoke, almost choking with thirst, I could see that the sun had already begun to set. As I lay there half-dazed, staring dreamily out through the port, a very strange thing happened. A shadow fell between me and the light, but so enfeebled had I become, so utterly prostrate both in mind and body, that I lay staring at it without any thought of rising to investigate. And yet the shadow hung fair against the port, and even seemed to bump like a solid thing. Then it disappeared, and as suddenly appeared again, and each time it hung before me it shook itself as though it wanted to come in. But it was not till the thing disappeared downwards, as though it would rush into the sea, that my faculties returned to me. Then I saw

that it was attached to a line, and I guessed in a moment what it meant.

Springing hurriedly across the cabin I was about to put out my hands to draw in the line, when suddenly it slipped and fell, and I had the mortification of knowing that I had lost a good meal, and probably a bottle of tea. Simultaneously, with the dropping of the line came the mate's voice in angry altercation. A blow followed, and then I distinctly heard Ji Ji grunt. Poor old Ji Ji! In a minute I was as soft as butter.

Slowly the horrible hours crept on. I saw the sun go down, and watched the darkness come creeping up with soft silver steps, but I never saw it approach with greater terror. Were the fiends going to leave me all night without food or drink? If they did, I knew that I should either be dead in the morning, or mad. With such strength as was still left me I hurled myself against the door, and shouted till my greatest effort wore itself to a whisper.

When I awoke to consciousness I saw the moon shining in on me through the port, and for a while I wondered where I was and

what had happened. But recollection soon came to the aid of thought. My assault on the door must have laid me prostrate, and there on the floor I had lain ever since. Nor had I any inclination to move now, but seemed quite content to lie there and watch the moon as she hove in sight with every roll of the vessel. I put my hands to my mouth, but it might have been carved of stone : my tongue was so dry that it lost its sense of touch, or else my fingers were dead. I was not strong enough to be unhappy. I only knew that I had just awakened from a long sleep, and I had a presentiment that I was about to embark on a longer.

Just then, while I was in that middle stage between waking and sleeping, I thought I heard a clicking, scratching sound above my head ; but I was in an almost comatose state and paid no heed to it. I was thinking how bright the moon was, and how civil it was of the ship to roll in such an agreeable manner. A few inches less would have left me in utter darkness.

Then, undoubtedly, something did click sharply above my head, and with a sudden

heart-beat I listened. The next thing I felt was a draught of cool air rushing across my face. I was not so far gone but I knew what this meant. My door had been suddenly opened. Yet I was too much exhausted to make an effort to move. There I lay wondering in a vague sort of manner what was going to happen next.

And this is what happened. A figure, cool and white as an angel, glided into my room ; angel arms pressed my head to a soft white breast ; a pair of angel eyes stared down into mine ; an angel hand gave me something cool to drink. I still have a clear recollection of that drink, the more than honey sweetness of it, the heavenly coolness. I didn't know what it was : I only knew that it was some glorious elixir.

The angel, as she stroked my brow, kept murmuring "Poor boy, poor boy !" and some other things which no doubt were only my fancy. I know it was heavenly to lie in those soft arms, to feel those cool fingers on my throbbing temples, to press my parched lips to the nectar. I closed my eyes and sighed, and the "poor boying" went on with greater

earnestness than before. There was something delightful in such maternal anxiety : something delightful in such exquisite helplessness. It was a long time since I had been nursed in such a way. The experience was so full of sweet memories that I bore it unflinchingly.

My next recollection was that my hands were free, and this produced such a strong feeling of gratitude in me that I sat bolt upright and opened my eyes. Beside me knelt Mrs. Castle, her big dark eyes full of anxiety. I looked about me wonderingly, from her to the door, and seemed to ask the question.

"Precisely," she said. "I heard them boasting of the way you had been treated : indeed I think they spoke chiefly for my benefit. The result is this. Oh, it was easy enough to get the key once he was drunk. But never mind him or them. I want you to eat and drink. You must keep strong, for who can say what will happen next on such a ship as this ?"

"You are very kind," I said. Surely a miserable speech when my heart was brimming with gratitude ?

"I am not ungrateful," was her reply. "You would do as much for me ?"

"Surely !"

"Then please eat. It's only bread and potted tongue, but it's the best I could get."

"I would like some more of that delicious drink first."

"Poor boy!" she murmured. The elixir was only water, and none too good at that.

When I had eaten and drunk my fill I felt but little the severity of my imprisonment. A turn or two on deck and a little fresh air would have set me up.

"And now," I said, "can you tell me why the captain has subjected me to this indignity?"

She was on the little settle beneath the port: I lounged against my bunk at the far end.

"Who shall explain his reasons?" she answered bitterly. "He hates you, that is the only reason I know."

"But this hint that the mate threw out—have you heard nothing of that?"

"The mate has thrown out so many hints."

"But this one touches me nearly. It amounts to this, that the captain suspects me of being concerned in the mutiny."

“An excuse to hide his own vacillation. He knows nothing could be more absurd : his object is to lay you under suspicion. You can guess the reason. In short, Mr. Quenton, if we should ever steer safely through this sea of calamities—which I am beginning to doubt—he will have ruined your evidence.”

I admitted that such was my solution. What reliance could be placed upon the word of an officer whose conduct had been written down as refractory, who had been put in irons under the gravest suspicion ? The clean sheet I had brought with me from the Red Funnel Line was now smeared with horrid blots.

But I was somewhat astonished to hear her speak so bluntly of her lord. There was no mincing of matters, no attempt at palliation : what she did not say in words she made up for in accent. It was painfully evident that she had already conceived for her husband a most profound dislike, which I am bound to admit that worthy man did nothing to soften. Had he set out with the intention of making his young wife hate him, he could not have gone to work in a better

way. That she was a woman capable of strong feeling I did not doubt. There was something defiant in her eye, something contemptuous in the curl of her lip, which plainly indicated that she was not a woman with whom one might trifle. I marvelled much at Castle : his surpassing egoism. In his blind wilfulness he was preparing much future distress. I had long thought it : her words but confirmed the thought.

But in the meantime, growing confidential, she expatiated rather freely on the abuses aboard the *Corea*, which abuses she did not hesitate to lay at the door of her husband, of whom she spoke in a most unwifely fashion.

“And yet if what I say is true,” she went on, her dark eyes flashing inquiringly into mine, “you must be asking yourself why I—why I married him. Sometimes I wonder myself, wonder at my madness, at my utter lack of penetration. Just a woman’s folly, I suppose. There is no one so easily imposed upon—not even a child. Then, too, there are many circumstances. Life is governed by condition.”

I thought I understood her : I understand at least the human aspiration for something different, something better. Black bread is good enough till you have eaten white. Only her white bread had turned sour : the weevils had stolen into it and eaten out the heart.

I think she must have stayed with me close on two hours, and I never knew two hours pass so quickly. In that time I learned much of her history, for she seemed as though she wished to stand well with me, and at times grew almost embarrassingly communicative. That she had been deceived in Captain Castle I did not doubt. The lackadaisical, shore-going dandy was totally different from the sailor-man. Ashore, as I have said, he might easily pass for a very good sort of fellow : afloat, with the whisky aboard, the man seemed to assume another temperament with his uniform. Off duty and on duty seemed to make all the difference in the world.

Before she went, which was not till the first grey shadows of the morning began to shoot up out of the sea, she made me finish the tongue and the remainder of the bread.

Then she went off to forage for more, returning a few minutes later with a similar load. Nor did she forget to replenish my water-bottle, or do her best to make me as comfortable as my unpleasant circumstances would permit.

I held out my hands for her to slip the irons on.

"It must be," she said, "if only to avert suspicion. I will come again as soon as I can."

I did not like the thought of her going, and I told her so.

"Ah," she replied with an undeniable tone of regret, "if we hadn't to waste our lives in vain sighing, what a paradise this earth would be!"

"Perhaps it's as well."

"No, no—how can it be?" Then she blushed and smiled, and her eyes meeting mine turned me giddy.

"Well, I shall not rail at captivity while I have such a gaoler," I mumbled, which might have been rather a pretty compliment if it had only been said properly.

I thought it easier facing Li Chee and his savages than the battery of her eyes. How

Castle could have treated her with such scant respect seemed more of a mystery than ever. But as I am a modest man I do not like my looks misconstrued. It is even probable that she might have seen something in my eyes which had no business there, and for which I could not honestly account. Such a thing would have been decidedly embarrassing to a man of a retiring disposition.

CHAPTER XI

THE THREE JUNKS

SOME four or five hours later the lock again clicked and the mate entered, this time with a jug of water and some bread and bacon. The water he pushed towards me, the food he flung into the bunk. The bright daylight streaming into the port lit his ugly satyr face in a way that rendered it hideously repulsive. His eyes were red as though he had been weeping. He looked ineffably surly and only half-awake. The brute, who had evidently gone to bed in his clothes, reeked of whisky and a stuffy bunk. Egad, the whisky drunk aboard that ship would have set her well afloat.

"Well," said he, "enjoying yourself?"

"Only moderately."

"Oh, you're too beastly particular."

"Well, you see, the *Corea* would spoil any one."

"You look well on it anyway," he answered suspiciously.

"Thanks to your great kindness and consideration." He looked round inquiringly. I immediately added, "You left me the water-jug."

"I'm too dashed kind," he growled. "Even that was against the captain's orders."

I doubted him, though I did not tell him so. Sweet are the uses of adversity. A man can't talk well in irons. I looked my gratitude. He grinned in a surly, unsociable fashion. The baboon, I could have twisted his ears !

I put the water-jug to my mouth and drank deeply, but not so deeply as I pretended. I had to practise a little deceit on the brute, who eyed me with an amused smile.

"Scissors !" he said.

I smiled faintly, apologetically. I was really ashamed of such a prodigious thirst, but if they would keep me on such short commons the fault was scarcely mine. The mate, standing with his great back to the door, shuddered as he thought of so much water. Unconsciously he pressed his stomach.

"There's the grub," he growled. "Why don't you tuck in?"

The inward pangs were more than he could bear.

The grub consisted of a stale half-loaf and some fat edges of bacon, the remains, I doubted not, of the breakfast aft. I begged him to excuse me. My confinement had left me without appetite or inclination.

He admitted that he had seen better stuff; but that he had eaten worse; and after all a chap who was ironed on suspicion of being concerned in a mutiny had no right to expect much consideration. I smiled, and he saw the smile, but as he passed it by I bore his insinuation with my usual philosophic calm. My uncomplaining attitude might give me a great reputation for obstinacy, but that I could not help. I did not even ask him how long he thought my incarceration would last. In fact, I rather looked forward to the night and what it might bring forth. Given certain conditions, there was a good deal in potted tongue.

But it was a weary day, for once the mate had gone I never caught sight or sound of

anything human. All through the long bright hours I lay dozing, listening, or trying to read: now peering eagerly through the port, now stamping the few feet of my room. I saw the sun reach his meridian, and knew by the sky when he was about to take his evening plunge. Then gradually the night stole up out of the sea, just as the day had done some twelve hours before, and I saw the moonbeams dance upon the water, which glimmered and glinted like a golden pathway.

With the night came the hope that I might see her again, and even as I lay dozing I thought of the cool angel hands and the soft voice that had cried so pitifully, "Poor boy, poor boy!" But she never came near me, and though a dozen times I awoke and sat up thinking I heard the click of the lock, the day eventually broke, and I knew that she would not come.

For a long time I lay watching the gradually-increasing light, chagrined not a little, and not a little glad. She was much too nice to be unhappy, and though I was a philosopher, and prudent to a degree, I am inclined to believe that a few weak places might have

been found in my composition. That is, if any one searched very assiduously. But while I worshipped Prudence I felt like giving her a sly pinch. She is an aggravating wench, make what you will of her.

I admit the unphilosophic nature of these reflections, and I hope I am duly ashamed of them. They annoyed me exceedingly. I might have smacked myself had my hands been free. As it was, I endeavoured to make amends by hurling some most offensive epithets at my own head. Then suddenly my thoughts forsook their vituperative channel, and I listened intently.

A scramble was going on above deck. I could distinctly hear the clatter of feet as the men ran hither and thither. Then at intervals the mate's voice roared out an order, and now and again I thought I heard the captain. I listened, half-expecting to hear the engines throb. But, of course, that could not be. Craigiemore had explained the smash. The thing was impossible. Yet what could the unwonted bustle mean? Somebody rapped on my door as he went hurrying by, to whom I called out rather cynically, "Come in."

Then came an interval of silence, presently to be followed by the renewed clatter and the hoarse shoutings of the mate. And all the while I lay staring out through the port wondering in a vague sort of way of the doings above deck.

At last, to appease my curiosity, and with the instinctive feeling that all was not well, I scrambled out of my bunk and flew to the port, and there, not five hundred yards away, I saw a junk. I could easily make out the dim-coloured figures that swarmed her deck, and I guessed that she was on no charitable purpose bent. Her curiously-shaped sails stood out boldly in the sun, and she flung the water from her low sharp nose with the dignity of a liner. On her quaint high poop she carried a brass gun, the flashings of which came ominously across the sea.

So this was the cause of the bustle. It was no joke to fall in with the predatory junk in our disabled condition. If she were not companionless the situation would be critical. No wonder the mate swore and the men clattered, though something more than swearing would be required now. I had heard a good deal of

the pirates who infest the China Seas seeking whom they may devour. Ostensibly engaged in honest trade, they only await their opportunity. With everything going well aboard there is no fear of them ; but once let the ship run ashore, or in any way roll disabled, then it is best to keep a good look-out and be prepared for any emergency.

I watched the junk with a singular sort of fascination. These curiously-shaped craft are beautiful sailers, and this one was no exception to the rule. The wind had freshened a little, and the sea showed a dozen white caps here and there ; but the junk rode it like a bird, her great mainsail keeping her as steady as a rock. Her intention was evidently to beat up as close under our lee as possible, for as I watched her she came up to the wind and put about as daintily as a cat. Then she went away to starboard, but I could see that she was nosing fair up into the wind, and that another board would bring her mighty close.

Then the next question arose : Was she by herself ? I doubted it. She seemed to carry a big crew, but big crew notwithstanding, I

did not think she would dare attack us single-handed. That these Chinese freebooters are a desperate lot everybody knows, but they are hardly desperate enough, unless they be in great numbers, to attack a European. I screwed my head out of the port and looked to right and left, but could see no sign of any other junk. If there were any in the neighbourhood they must have been well on the weather side.

I was not at all reassured by what I had seen, though what I had not seen caused me the greater anxiety. Nor did my ignorance of the means we had adopted for our defence lessen that feeling. Knowing something of Captain Castle's mode of fighting, I did not place much reliance in him or his officers. Craigiemore might do something if left to himself, and Ji Ji if properly led; but I held the others in no great esteem. Minton the mate might be a very good man in a rough and tumble, but I doubted his head as well as his heart. Still, Heaven knows, I was no fighting man myself, and if the mate valued his baboon hide, it was the only one he had.

I admit I had no fancy for being shut up in my room while there was any excitement aboard, and though I had had quite enough of fighting, I was seized with a plaguy fit of curiosity. I wanted to know what was going on, and for the first time my philosophic calm almost forsook me. I rattled noisily on the door, and was about to shout through the port when I heard the key click in the lock. Stepping back, I waited. Presently the door opened, and Mrs. Castle stood in the entrance.

"You!" I gasped.

Somehow I had not expected her. I thought my release might come, for in the attack I anticipated every unit would be of value; but I had not thought of her as my liberator.

She smiled, but it was an anxious, ill-at-ease sort of smile.

"Yes. We are in great danger. You are wanted."

I held out my hands; she unlocked the irons: I was free.

"What is the matter?"

"Three big junks, crowded with pirates, are preparing to attack us, and in one of them is the man Li Chee."

Phew ! This was news indeed. Li Chee safe and ripe for revenge ! I recalled the look of hate in his hideous face as the waves swept him by ; I saw again his bared knife, as he shook it threateningly at the captain. What was the reckoning to be this time ?

I turned to the woman. She was very pale, with a paleness that spoke of incessant worry ; the sort of look that takes lodgment in the face despite the bravest effort to keep it down.

"I am sorry for you, Mrs. Castle. You are having a dreadful experience."

"Oh," she answered, making a pitiful attempt to smile, "I have always been accustomed to sad experiences."

I thought her look invited confidence, and at any other time I might have shown some curiosity ; but the occasion was extraordinary, and the object of my solicitude was the wife of my dearest enemy. The whole matter was so exceedingly incongruous that I knew not how to deal with it.

But in the meantime we found our way on deck, she walking by my side as if to protect me. Immediately making for the weather

side, I saw the three junks in a cluster sailing well away to windward, but so far off were they that I could just make out the men on board.

"How do you know Li Chee is there?" I asked.

"He sailed quite close just now, and shook his knife at us. The chief officer said that the other mutineers were with him. Do you think they intend to sail away?"

"I hope so with all my heart, but I fear they are only arranging a plan of attack. They are not likely to sheer off without striking a blow."

She pressed her lips close and looked almost angry in her impatience.

"How I wish we were safe ashore!"

A humorous twinge, grim as death, shot through me. To her pious wish I added a devout amen. She looked at me and smiled.

"Are you afraid?"

"Horribly."

"I wish I were afraid in the same way."

"Then you would experience a most unpleasant sensation."

She smiled. It was evidently no use

attempting to convince her. She had made up her mind that I was a ferocious fire-eater, and my attempts to prove the contrary but strengthened that conviction. I wonder how many heroes are made in the same way ?

When I emerged upon the deck I noticed here and there large heaps of lump-coal, with a coal-hammer, a shovel, or a crowbar stacked alongside of each heap ; and even as I looked I saw Craigiemore, the third, and Ji Ji come up from below, each carrying a sack of coals on his back, the lumps from which were distributed amongst the various heaps. Though guessing the meaning of these preparations, I was about to advance to the second engineer to make inquiries, when the captain, who had been standing aft watching the junks through his glasses, saw me. For a moment he looked hard as though to make sure. Then like an angry lion he bounded forward, his moustaches bristling furiously.

“Hallo !” he shouted, “what are you doing here ?”

As I was doing nothing just then I felt like saying so, but thinking such an admission might savour overmuch of impertinence, I

held my tongue and saluted. This incessant nag, nag, was the most wearisome thing in existence.

"Who let you out?" he roared; "tell me, who let you out?"

"I did," said his wife.

"You, eh? My God, madam, you seem mighty solicitous of this young man's welfare!"

The sneer was most apparent, but beyond a sudden deep flushing of the face she did not seem to heed it.

"And yours," she said coldly. "He is the man who saved us: he is the only man who can save us now."

"We shall see. You will go below, sir, and remain there till further orders."

"Are you mad?" she cried. "Have you so many men that you can easily spare a good one?"

He hesitated: then he laughed insolently, but rather more loudly than the occasion seemed to warrant.

"No, you're right, I cannot spare a good man; neither can I trust a bad one."

"This is sheer obstinacy. Mr. Quenton

has no wish to set your authority at defiance, but it is your duty to use every available man. If we succeed in beating these pirates off, I am sure he will go back to his cabin and await your pleasure."

There was much sense in what she said, but she entirely spoiled its effect by the tone she adopted. The emphasis she put on the two words, "your pleasure," was enough to make a man curl up and hide himself for ever. The old man fairly squirmed. His yellow eyebrows came down in a ragged fringe; his yellow moustache took a fierce upward curl; his yellow face grew almost black with the rush of bad blood.

"Damn you!" he muttered, "you take too much upon yourself. Go below instantly and stay there till you learn how to behave yourself.—As for you, you mutinous dog," and he turned furiously upon me, "let me warn you to be careful. You have seen how I treat people who would endanger the safety of my ship. I have very little more patience to spare."

Yes, I had seen, and from that I had gathered much. But I was sick of him and his ways.

"As anything I may say will only be misconstrued, I had better not say anything. I was certainly under the impression that I had been liberated to take part in the defence of the ship ; but I really haven't much stomach for fighting, sir, and I daresay I shall be much safer below."

As I spoke I saluted and turned to go, but at that moment the report of a gun was heard, and looking away to windward we saw that the junks were bearing down on us, three abreast, and that a little white cloud of smoke was sailing before the middle one. The captain immediately sprang away aft, where the mate was already standing, while every available man flew to his station, which was beside one of the coal heaps. Craigiemore, who was standing just opposite, beckoned me over.

"Don't you think you had better go below, Mrs. Castle ?" I ventured to suggest.

"Oh, I'm not afraid," she answered. "Where all are heroes I must not be lacking in heroism."

"But you might get hit, you know."

"And what then ?" The question was reckless, almost hysterical.

"Well, it might—it might hurt."

"So it might. I never thought of that. But if it only hurts I shall be able to bear it."

I never liked those mysterious hints, and she was rather fond of them. They always made me feel a bit of a fool: made me feel as though I were standing on something of which I knew not the nature.

"Don't bother about me, Mr. Quenton," she continued. "I am sure to come out all right." Another of those double-meaning speeches! "Now take your place and let them see the mistake they have made." And lightly waving her hand she tripped away aft. I went over to Craigiemore, who looked a rare sight covered from head to foot with coal-dust.

"Glad to see ye, man," he shouted, for no particular reason that I was aware of. "I was afraid yon mule would keep ye under lock and key. We have a busy time the day."

"So it appears. Mrs. Castle told me Li Chee was aboard one of those junks. Is that so?"

"Sure," said he. "I saw him with my own eyes. The son-of-a-gun shook his fist at us as he passed."

"I suppose we have no arms of any sort aboard?"

"None whatever; and this is our only ammunition." He pointed to the great lumps of coal. "Lucky we had a few tons of Welsh aboard as well as the Nagasaki. They're no such verra bad nut-crackers!"

"If the nuts get in the way."

"Ay, to be sure."

Craigiemore looked as though the suggestion had awakened another thought, and not a very consoling one.

Here another shot rang out from the advancing junks, but though we presented a fairly wide surface, we fortunately escaped without injury. The brass gun which I had noticed, and which, no doubt, had once been the pride of a peaceful poop, was engaged in an adventure for which she was never intended.

"Whose brilliant idea is this?" said I, pointing to the coal heaps.

The second engineer hung his head like a boy caught doing something wrong.

“Mine.”

“And a very good idea too—if we only had a catapult. Now if you could only bring your engines or boilers into play.”

He regarded me with a pitying look, a look which said, “Ye’re a puir body, Quenton. I’m awfu’ sorry for ye, but ye’re a puir creeture.” Then all at once a sudden, bright look leaped to his eyes. He bounded in the air, and throwing up his hands shouted, “The verra thing—the verra thing, by God !”

I looked at him inquiringly, but without deigning to explain himself he said, “Here, man, take my place and bide awee.” Then without further ceremony he darted from me, and I saw him descend the forward companion.

Had Craigiemore gone mad ?

CHAPTER XII

THE ATTACK

THE junks were now bearing down on us with the evident intention of boarding. Down they came on the wind, three abreast, their long low snouts tossing up the foam in little clouds. Notwithstanding their mission, I could not help admiring the advance, it was so regular, free, and pretty. Like three great birds—vultures for choice—they came swooping down upon us, approaching so close without altering their course, that I began to wonder if it was their stupid intention to ram us. Alas, the stupidity was all mine. When within a hundred yards or so they opened out : one junk made for our stem, the other for our stern, while the one in the middle came sweeping onward. Now it looked any odds on a collision, but when within a dozen lengths of us she suddenly spun round sharp

as you please, and again her brass gun snapped. This time a projectile of some sort shattered a corner of the deck-house a little aft of me. The battle had begun.

Ranged at intervals along our deck stood our little army of defenders. I was about midships; a bit forward of me was Ji Ji, his yellow face almost livid with excitement. Beyond him again was the third, and away in the bows loomed the figure of the third engineer. Each stood beside his heap of coal, a big piece ready for heaving. Ji Ji had also armed himself with some cable links and a long sharp piece of iron like a lance. Though terribly excited, I knew he would stand his ground, and that meant more opposition than at first appeared. I waved my hand to him and smiled. He grinned in a blue sort of way, his face appearing to be ten times more hideous than it really was.

Away aft stood the captain, mate, and chief engineer, talking, gesticulating, and apparently much perturbed. Now and again they looked at me, and then held an excited confab. The captain was very angry, but I had much faith in the counsels of the canny engineer. Castle

was the sort of man who would butt down a stone wall : the engineer would walk round it. After all, perhaps I was better where I was.

Presently the captain approached me, and I wondered what was coming.

"Where's that skulking Scotchman?" he shouted.

"He went forward, sir."

"What for?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Curse him, the canting humbug," he roared. "Am I never to be obeyed?"

He looked as though he expected an answer, but I was chary of engaging him in such a mood. He went aft muttering furiously. Poor man, he had much to trouble him.

Against the lee-shrouds of the mizzen-mast stood his wife, apparently the coolest soul aboard the ship. She saw the junks, and no doubt guessed what her fate would be if the pirates succeeded in boarding us : yet she seemed to watch the whole proceedings with but an impersonal sort of interest, an indifference which was my envy and admiration. Though anything but a warrior myself, I have a sneaking regard for any one who

turns a good front to the enemy: when a woman teaches me such an object lesson, I admit words fail to express my admiration. I think her presence, her undaunted bearing, did us all a world of good. If, hitherto, we had considered the struggle hopeless, we could not now that we looked on her. Our duty was to beat off the would-be boarders. While she was there to watch us I believe we almost felt equal to the task. I admit I had no taste for the work, for if the pirates possessed anything in the shape of firearms, it would be a sad business—for us. And yet her presence acted on me in a way that made me feel extremely foolish. My head grew large and light. I felt equal to half-a-dozen junks. If the pirates boarded us it would not be from where I stood. That's the sort of fool I felt just through looking at her.

But in the meantime the junks had swung to under our lee, absolutely not three dozen yards away. I easily made out the bad man Li Chee, who looked more villainous than ever. As he saw me he waved his hand and grinned till I saw every one of his bad teeth. I never knew any one have such a slit as Li Chee.

I waved my hand in reply—and then bobbed suddenly. A fellow in the stern was pointing a gun in my direction. I believe it is bad form for a soldier to bob. It looks as though he were afraid of being hit, which of course no man is. Yet it struck me that I might be, so I sank on one knee while the bullet whistled harmlessly over my head. I admit to thinking discretion the better part of valour. Those who like bullets can have them : I don't care much for them myself. It even appeared to me that the sea was much the better place for that sort of thing ; much better, at any rate, than my body. But perhaps I was prejudiced.

This shot was the signal for three or four more, but thanks to the erratic movements of the junks no one seemed a bit the worse. Their three or four guns apparently comprised the whole armament of the attacking force, and by the time they were reloaded the wind and sea had carried the enemy well to leeward. They therefore hauled taut their sails and began again to beat close up. Li shook his fist at us and smiled. He was coming on presently, was Mr. Li.

The pirates, foiled in a first attempt, would

learn wisdom ere they ventured a second. I was glad the wretches had gone off, but otherwise I found little cause for self-congratulation—unless it was that my good friend Neptune had very kindly swallowed the ball intended for me. I knew the enemy would return to the attack, an attack which only had to be bold enough to succeed.

Just here the absent Craigiemore stole to my side.

“Did I not hear some firin’?” he asked.

“Probably.”

Truth to tell, I was at a loss to understand his sudden retreat below. His reappearance as soon as the enemy had sheered off was not a source of consolation. I was very fond of Craigiemore, but at the same time I hoped he had a decent explanation to offer.

“We’ll make it a trifle warm for them presently, I’m thinkin’. The de’il himself is in the thought. Do ye ken, Quenton, man—the de’il himself is in it?”

“In what?” I asked rather gruffly, not a little annoyed at his impudent exuberance.

“Ye’ll ken presently, laddie, never fear.”

His big, dirty, honest face positively beamed with joy. I felt like being nasty. No doubt I also should have enjoyed the situation could I have sneaked below and got some fool to take my place. I had no special yearning to join in the excitement, or pose as a living target. I am a peaceful man, and do not approve of such rash experiments.

"I've been jolly near shot," I growled. "Where's the fun of it?"

"Ay, lad, the fun's to come. Dinna ye ken, ye crab, the fun's a' to come?"

"Um," I muttered. "I suppose you mean to take your share of it?"

He looked puzzled. His keen eyes stopped laughing: he favoured me with a solemn, penetrating look.

"I dinna quite follow ye, laddie."

I could have bitten my tongue out. The pained look in his face showed me what he thought. Had he turned round and kicked me I would have borne it without a murmur.

"Oh, I'm in a beast of a humour," I mumbled. "Don't take any notice of me."

"Nay, laddie, but ye meant something?"

"Fighting always annoys me," I answered

feebly. "I think it's the most stupid thing a man can do."

He laid his big hand on my shoulder and pulled me round so that I had to look him in the face.

"Look ye here, laddie," he said, "if ye hear onybody say that Jim Craigiemoire is a coward, just ye tell him for me that he's a dunned liar."

I didn't know the man who would call Craigiemoire a coward to his face. I could have kicked myself with vexation. Of all the surly, blundering idiots that ever lived, I believed this same Dick Quenton to be the most blundering. I looked fore and aft, to windward, to leeward—anywhere to escape those reproving eyes. But his pride would not let him explain, and I knew I was not worth an explanation.

In looking round I saw the mate draw the attention of the chief engineer to something forward. Following the direction of his hand I beheld smoke issuing from the funnel in a goodly quantity : like the bat that I was I saw nothing but smoke.

The chief engineer stepped briskly towards us.

"Craigiemore !"

"Sir."

"What's the meanin' o' yon smoke ?"

"Eh, that just means that we're boilin' the kettle for afternoon tea."

"Boilin' the kettle !" growled the chief. "Do ye no ken that it's wastin' the company's coal ?"

"Maybe a scuttleful or twa," protested Craigiemore. "Ye wadna grudge a leetle extra by way o' entertainment for our veesitors ?"

It was curious how Scotch the second grew when speaking to the chief.

"I dinna ken ye, man, but ye're sair gifted wi' your tongue."

"Aweel, aweel," said his subordinate, "I'll no forget to send you an inveetation to the christenin'."

"Look ye here, Craigiemore," replied the chief, "an ye dinna ken your wharabouts better, your ain mither's son will have an awfu' bad tale to tell when he gangs hame."

Craigiemore laughed. "Ooch, chief, ye wadna tur-rn on me ?"

"Weel, weel," mumbled the chief, "ye ken

noo whar ye stand, and ye ken your Archibald Campbell."

Craigiemore nodded and the chief hurried aft, for by this time the enemy was just on the point of executing another movement. The three junks had drawn fairly close together away out to windward, and I doubted not that they had formed their plan of attack. At any rate they put about and came down towards us, though this time in different formation.

The junk with the brass cannon led the way, the amiable Li bringing up the rear. They made a brave show as they came swinging down on the wind, though I did not like the look of the preparations that were going on along the starboard side of each. They savoured overmuch of a desperate attempt to board. I could see the men standing with coils of rope in their hands: I guessed the destined use of those ropes, and what kind of implement was attached to the end of each.

All this, of course, took time. Indeed, something more than half-an-hour must have elapsed between their sheering off and their second formation; though the enemy's move-

ments seemed to be executed with such lightning-like rapidity as to make it difficult to gauge the time correctly.

Craigiemore stood watching them, a strange glow in his usually thoughtful eyes.

"I'm thinkin' we're in for a bad time, Quenton," he said. There was no trace of resentment in his voice. He knew I had made a mistake : he knew I was sorry.

I nodded. It seemed to me that I had had nothing else since joining the *Corea*.

"Ye havena said your prayers for a lang day, I doot?"

I admitted as much. There is but a feeble shred of godliness in man. When I was a boy I had such a great terror of Satan that I dared not turn in without praying, for fear of waking up in hell. When the boy becomes a man, hell seems farther off—and heaven !

"Weel, weel, laddie," muttered the engineer, "you'd better say them the noo."

"My dear Craigiemore, do give me credit for a little decency."

"False pride, false pride," said he, stooping and balancing a big block of coal. "Ye dinna ken the comfort o' prayer. It makes ye feel

keen an' eager for the fray—as though ye wad like to take on a whole ridgymment. It's awfu' wicked, na doot," he added with a smile, "but when ye hae to face wicked folk ye must fight them with their ain weepens. Now what think ye, Quenton: how many nuts ough I to crack wi' this wee bit o' coal?"

I could not help laughing, serious as was the occasion. It was Cromwell's advice over again: "Pray to God, men—but keep your powder dry."

"Just as many as you hit," I said.

He smiled his grave, double-meaning smile.

"Ah weel, I'm sorry for them, puir misguided bodies, but I hope they'll no come near enough to get hurt."

I hoped so too—devoutly. In fact, the farther off they kept the better I should like it. I had had quite enough of John Chinaman at close quarters. He did not smell sweet.

But John had no intention of sheering off just yet. As Craigiemore and I were speaking the junks rapidly approached, the foremost one passing close in under our stern and then sailing through the comparatively

smooth water on our lee. The second followed close at her heels, the third rounding our quarter just as the second began to beat across our stern. At the tiller of the hindmost junk stood the redoubtable Li, and as he shot by the little group aft he waved towards the captain. On passing Craigiemore and me, by which time considerable way had been taken off his boat, he favoured us with one of his most seraphic grins.

“Good molnin’, Quenton,” he shouted, the impertinent rogue.

“Good mornin’ to ye,” said Craigiemore.

“Me come aboard plesently.”

“Nay, laddie, ye needna bother. We’ll con-seeder that ye’ve already called and left your card.”

But by this time Li was well out of reach of this witticism, and was following the other two junks round our bows. What this man-œuvre meant I at first failed utterly to comprehend. The fellows had made no attempt to board us. On the contrary, it seemed by the way they grinned and nodded that nothing more dangerous than curiosity had brought them to such close quarters, or a vain desire

to show off their seamanship and the excellent qualities of their craft. Certainly, if such was the case, they had succeeded admirably in their intentions, for both seamanship and ships seemed to be of the first order. If their determination and fighting qualities were as good, I anticipated a most unpleasant experience.

But this evolution was not all vanity, as we were soon to learn. In fact, as soon as I saw them shaping as if to repeat the movement, I knew their object had been to see how close up under our lee they could sail. This time, indeed, the leading junk, rounding to windward, steered as if she meant to strike our stern; and so close did she come that she seemed to graze us. As she swept round and swung close under our counter she was received with a volley from the three men aft.

This evidently disconcerted her, as it did several of her crew, who had not anticipated such an uncivil greeting. The steersman, losing his head, let his ship fall away a few points, so that by the time she was abreast of us she had passed beyond our reach. She, however, nosed up rapidly, and her crew fired

a couple of indignant shots at the group aft. The cannon, fortunately, was not brought into play. It might, by accident, have caused some damage.

But in the meantime the second and third junks came whizzing round, nosing in so close to us that I saw in a moment their order of battle, and knew that Craigiemore and I would have to deal with junk number two.

The helm being put hard down she swung round with such force that her nose grated on our side, and at the same moment a couple of her crew sprang forward, each with a coil of rope in his hand, to which was attached a big hook. I at once flung a great lump of coal at the foremost ruffian, but missing him brought another man to his knees. The engineer, more sure of aim, laid his man out as flat as a flounder. Then amid screams and oaths, varied by an occasional gunshot, the fight began along the whole lee side of the ship.

Like a madman I fell upon the lumps of coal, and, I fear much, like a madman I heaved them down upon the enemy ; that is, my aim was hardly as true as it might have

been. Craigiemore, on the contrary, seemed in a capital humour, and shot with much vigour and accuracy. With each projectile discharged by him he sent a sympathetic message, such as, "Look oot, laddie, or ye'll be gettin' hurt," and "There noo, I told ye so. Dinna ye think it's aboot time ye were awa'?" "Bless me, man, your mither'll never ken ye," as he flattened out one gigantic ruffian: "I hope the lasses 'll nae grieve too much," as he spoilt the beauty of another. "The Lord be wi' ye," he cried as he brought the big coal shovel down on the head of an imprudent rascal, "for the de'il's in the thing." Of one truth I was assured: a devil had got hold of the handle, a devil who fought none the gentler for all his appearance of Christian solicitude.

But while all this was going on I had not been idle, and chiefly owing to my exertions our coal-heap rapidly disappeared. Yet the whole affair was more of a confused scramble than a fight, and in the *melée* some of the monkeys had flung their grappling irons round our rail and made their ship fast to ours. As we swung broadside to broadside

we found that we had a considerable area to guard. Craigiemore took the after part of the junk, I the forward. He was armed with his formidable coal shovel : I had a big lump of iron not unlike a crowbar.

But it was not to be imagined that during all this time we escaped scot-free. Profiting by our example, and for the want of better material, the enemy began to pelt us back with our own ammunition. In this way I came by several nasty knocks. Nothing very serious, but just serious enough to let me know that I was not made of iron. Craigiemore fared even worse, one cut over his eye almost blinding him. The experience was novel and intensely interesting.

I could never quite make out whether a blow had stunned him, or whether he had stopped for a moment to wipe the blood from his eyes, nor was he sure himself ; but as I watched my end of the junk, now dodging the lumps of coal, and now having a smack at a shaven head, I heard a scuffle going on Craigiemore's way, and looking round I saw that hero driven back from the rail and sore beset by half-a-dozen yelling fiends. Instantly

I was by his side, and laying about me with my iron bar, soon cleared a passage. He was making no real attempt to fight, but in a dazed kind of way kept putting up his hands as if to guard his face.

“Craigiemore, Craigiemore !” I shouted.

Of a sudden his head went up, and he straightened himself as though he had been shot. Then, waking as it were, he laid about him with such zeal that he soon drove the enemy back to the rail.

But his rescue had not been effected without sacrifice. Seeing me leave my post, the men had seized the moment to board, and when I turned about again a dozen grimy wretches, some with bleeding heads and faces, and all with bared knives, stood between me and the rail.

There was no time for parley, no time for thinking out the situation. The enemy were before us ; that was an incontestable fact. Without a moment's hesitation Craigiemore sprang straight at them. I sprang after Craigiemore.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW CRAIGIEMORE PUT OUT THE FIRE

THE fight that followed was so desperate, blurred, and furious that I don't seem to remember much about it. It was give and take with a vengeance, and from what followed I am inclined to believe that we gave a good deal more than we took. Craigiemore used his heavy shovel with the most deadly effect, and I believe I swung my bar to some purpose. But what chiefly astonished me in the Scot was the manner in which he swore. All his exquisite coolness had utterly forsaken him. Excitement of the most red-headed kind had fairly got him in her clutches, and he swore with a hundred trooper-power. I can remember now, busy as I then was, and actually staring death in the face, thinking how strange it was that the quiet Craigiemore should thus blaspheme. It is very wicked,

no doubt, but even now I catch myself smiling quietly as I think of those awful oaths. They made danger and death ridiculous.

I cannot admit that the brawny engineer fought any the less nobly on account of his profanity. Where he got the breath to do it puzzled me. But then the beggar was as hard as one of his own pistons, and seemed capable of dealing as many quick and terrible blows. How he escaped annihilation I never could make out, for a dozen times at least his recklessness carried him into the most dangerous quarters, and as I had to follow him I was not much pleased with such behaviour. However, he managed to escape without serious injury, and gradually the mutineers were driven back over the rail. That is, those who were in front of him were only too glad of the chance to slip down into the junk; but others, unseen by us at that moment, made their way aft where the captain and his companions faced the redoubtable Li.

Craigiemore leaned on the rail and fairly gasped for breath. The blood and perspiration streaming down his face made him an

awesome sight. His hands and arms seemed cut in a dozen places, and if his face had not been so thickly smeared with coal-dust, which did not add to its beauty, one might have seen the pain in it.

On the deck before us lay at least half-a-dozen of our opponents, some, I feared, never to rise again ; others, unable to stand, crawled away round the engine-room skylight as if for dear life. I think none of them wished to get a further glimpse of that terrible Scot. What he must have seemed to them with his charmed life, his blackened and bloody face, and his more than human strength, must ever remain a mystery ; but I should say he would give the survivors something to talk about for many a day to come.

For a few moments only he clung gasping to the rail. Then, stooping down and picking up a knife that lay near him, he leaned out and severed the grappling line aft, I doing the same by the one forward. At this the pirates set up an infernal buzzing, and in the impotence of their fury they let fly a volley at us, one lump catching me a villainous crack beside the ear. Craigiemore got one on the

face, a nasty sharp bit that laid his cheek open. He turned to the junk, and shaking his shovel at its occupants, roared out a magnificent oath in extra special Scotch. The only answer was another volley, which hit him in several places. So furious was he at this that I thought he would have jumped down into the junk and laid about him; and probably he would have done something just as foolish had not the thing, its lashings cut, already drifted some little distance. For a moment his eyes sought mine—a wild, imploring look. Then dropping his shovel he seized one of the bodies that lay near, and swinging it above his head, flung it down into the junk. A shriek, a crash, and three or four of the pirates were fairly flattened by the missile.

“There, ye yellow swine, tak’ that!” roared the infuriated Scot; “and may ye a’ sup in hell the nicht.”

But so far I have only been able to describe our bout with the middle junk, though fore and aft the others were similarly engaged. It is of the after one I have now to speak.

We had effectually cleared out our own im-

mediate enemy : indeed he was now rolling a good eight lengths to leeward ; but those who had escaped our onslaught and made their way aft occasioned an unpleasant diversion in the captain's flank.

Craigiemore's breath came fast, but not so fast, I think, as mine. He looked at me. There was no need to speak of our danger. We knew it. He began to mutter, and I, looking round, saw Mrs. Castle on the weather side calmly walking forward. True, her face was as white as her dress, and in her eyes was an awful look of terror ; and yet about her there was a wonderful appearance of calm. She was frightened, horribly frightened, but by her desperate calmness I knew she had made up her mind to die her own way.

I sprang across to her, Craigiemore at my heels.

"God, madam, why don't you go below ?"

.She smiled, but without answering pointed to the sea.

I think she saw the look of horror in my face, for she instantly added, with much gentleness, laying her hand on my arm, "Only when there is no other hope."

“You promise?”

“I promise.”

What could I say? Indeed, there was no time for saying anything, for the hubbub aft increased every moment, as the pirates swarmed over the stern.

“Quick, quick,” I cried, “go below now. These wretches will be on us in a minute.”

“Let them come,” she said.

“Nay, Mistress Castle,” cried Craigiemore, “the de’il’s in them imps o’ Belzeebawb. See, they’re comin’ this way. I’m thinkin’ it’s time we were awa’.”

As he spoke he seized her hand and dragged her forward, apparently much against her will, and to my exceeding amazement I saw him disappear with her down the forward companion. I was so astounded that a baby could have flattened me. Craigiemore shirk a battle! Craigiemore run away and hide himself when there were blows impending! And yet I saw it with my own eyes.

All this occurred within the space of a very few moments, as hurriedly, in short, as men would act who know not which moment will be their last; but brief as was the period it

sufficed for Li and his adventurers to get a footing aft. Thinking of Craigiemore with sorrow, a sorrow not unmingled with shame, I rushed and took up a position by the captain. His yellow face had turned to a deathly white : in the quick glance I got of him I thought his moustache had gone white also. Campbell was laid out with a cut across his forehead, and the mate seemed to have undergone some rough usage.

The captain's eye brightened as it rested on me. He nodded encouragingly. Once before he had nodded in a similar manner. Even then, face to face as we were with what I truly believed to be the end, I could not forget.

It all happened in a moment, even with our eyes riveted upon the wretches. There was a sudden movement, a quick cry, and they were upon us. Then began a desperate hand-to-hand conflict, and sickening dull thuds and piercing shrieks were the order of the day. The whole air seemed full of knife-flashes, of hideous yellowy-white faces and horrid burning eyes. Then a blow on the side of the head laid me out. It was a

terrific smack, and had it descended fairly there would have been an end of me from that moment; but fortunately it only grazed the side of my head, though it nearly broke my shoulder. At any rate, I reeled and fell, and immediately a long sinewy hand was at my throat; a knife flashed before my eyes. I made sure that my end was come, though I was so confused that I didn't seem to mind much. Then, just as I was wondering how it would feel to have a knife between the ribs, I heard a crash above me, and my would-be murderer fell in a heap across my chest.

This proved the most wonderful restorative of my experience. I was on my feet in a second, and there stood dear old Ji Ji by my side, his ugly face livid with excitement. He had struck, and not a moment too soon. With my own bar of iron he had dealt the blow, and this he now forced into my hands. Without more ado I stood on my defence. But I no longer felt eager for fighting. For a man who had no wish to pose as a warrior I had certainly fallen upon evil times. That I stood upright I guessed, but how I did not know. My ears buzzed painfully: I had

suddenly grown extremely weak at the knees. In short, that blow had taken a good deal of the pride out of me.

But luckily at this moment we were reinforced by the advent of the third engineer. He with Ji Ji made up a formidable addition to our fighting strength. They, like Craigie-more and I, had succeeded in beating their adversaries off for the loss of the third mate.

Li's men now hesitated to advance, for which excellent piece of prudence I heaved a devout sigh. There is nothing so painfully wearisome as this incessant fighting when the result, as far as you are concerned, is doubtful. Some fellows may rather relish uncertainty. I have no particular leaning that way myself.

Had we known it then, or had we a Craigie-more to lead us, we might have turned this momentary check into a complete rout; for Li's blackguards could not have anticipated such a strenuous opposition from unarmed men, and they had had their fill of hard knocks. A rush then would probably have sent them helter-skelter over the rail. But the idea, as usual, came to me when too late; though I

doubt if our fellows had any great yearning for closer quarters. Be that as it may, the combatants stood glaring at each other, one glad of the respite, the other furious but irresolute.

Presently Li detached himself from the throng and advanced, the same inscrutable smile on his ugly face. He bowed very low and seemed quite pleased to renew the acquaintanceship.

“Good molnin’, cap’n,” he said. “This welly bad business; makee Li feel too muchee sad.”

The captain pressed hard his livid lips. Had he opened them I believe he would have shrieked.

“What do you want?” asked the mate.

Li turned to him, smiled and bowed. Even the mate’s red face had lost some of its glorious colouring.

“You welly fine mate,” said Mr. Li admiringly. “Hope you no belong sick?”

The mate mumbled something about somebody being sicker before he had finished with him, at which Li’s heavenly smile grew more beautifully intense.

“Mate belong too muchee fightee fightee. Li no likee fightee. Li allee same belong Chlistian man: he sabbee Chlistian man’s joss, Chlistian man’s glogy. Ploper Chlistian man no fightee: ploper Chlistian man let ’im brudder kick ’im. What for mate no belong ploper Chlistian man?”

The yellow-skinned son of Confucius was not without his wisdom and his sophistries. I could have found it in my heart to love him, were the beggar not so eager to cut my throat.

“Well,” growled the mate, who rather liked the allusion to his warlike propensities, “you’d better cut the cackle. What do you want?”

That was just it; what did he want? Li began a long rigmarole about the hardship to which he had been subjected, proclaiming the belief that he would have died had not the good people of the junks taken him and his men aboard. He assured us that they were a most respectable class of traders, and that nothing but a recital of his wrongs had urged them to revenge him. He was extremely sorry for what had happened, and

wished to come to some amicable arrangement with the skipper.

Now it all sounded very smooth and simple, for Mr. Li had a charming, oily voice when he liked ; but to me it seemed sadly lacking in sincerity, nor did I like the furtive glances he kept casting about him as he spoke. However, it was not my place to venture an opinion without being asked ; moreover, I guessed that the captain and the mate would gladly welcome any arrangement which would relieve them of any further fighting or anxiety.

But I who knew something of Li was not to be deceived by his apparent sincerity. His speech lacked a clear idea, a decisive point, and in my opinion was a mere subterfuge to gain time. Indeed, no sooner had this thought dawned upon me than I looked round and saw that the forward junk, beaten off at the bows, had gradually dropped astern till she was now alongside Li's boat. A moment later the thought was confirmed, for presently five or six wretches came scrambling over the stern.

Li grinned as he felt the edge of his villainous knife.

“Now, cap’n,” he said, “suppose you no sullender, me slit your dam thloath.”

The old man’s livid lips opened and he yelled, “I’ll see you in hell first!”

“Welly good. Li no pa’ticler. Sure to meet all good cap’ns there anyway.”

The first batch being reinforced by a further detachment, the outlook suddenly grew critical. I saw nothing for it now but a desperate rush—and oblivion. A ragged, dirty, villainous-looking lot were the new-comers, and by the way they grinned I could see they thought we were trapped at last.

The captain and the mate looked blankly at each other; there was no open admission, but each saw that the game was up. With a civilised enemy surrender would have been imperative; but surrender to a gang of lawless cut-throats would not alone mean death, but death from which the bravest might shrink. Truly Captain Castle in all his glory, clothed in the majestical authority of office, was a very different person from the scared creature who cowered by the forward end of the deck-house.

Now, had I really been as ill-natured as I

sometimes believe myself to be, this would have been my triumph; but instead of that I found myself so much concerned that I actually forgot my boasted prudence.

"If you will gradually retreat forward, sir," I whispered to the old man, "I will endeavour to hold these rascals in check."

Surprise and incredulity leaped to his troubled face; he seemed to ask me what object there was in going forward.

"It may for a time stave off the inevitable," I said. "Craigiemore is there. I saw him go down the forward companion."

The mate, who had overheard me, was not so slow to act as his captain. Stooping and seizing the engineer by the collar, he began slowly to drag him forward. Ji Ji, the third engineer, and myself, closed up to cover their retreat. But I knew it was a futile effort. Quite a score of grinning fiends faced us, and slowly but surely we were driven back.

All this time the enemy kept up a fearful jabbering, which had anything but a soothing effect on the nerves, while the smiling Li expended no inconsiderable quantity of wit

upon us. Sometimes the jab of a knife came mighty close ; sometimes an imprudent skull tested the weight of our metal. But, happily, there was no rush. They were so sure of eventually getting us that they meant to incur no risks, which wise policy of theirs we duly appreciated. Indeed, I might say that our admiration of Mr. Li's caution was almost intense.

Nevertheless we were slowly being driven into a corner. Forward of the after deck-house was the main hatch, and forward of that again was the winch. Just about here was the clearest space of the whole deck. Here the pirates seized the opportunity to surround us, and surround us they did till we were pressed back upon the rail. Further movement was now entirely out of the question, unless we took a back somersault overboard. Truly a case of between the devil and the deep sea.

Ji Ji, the third, and myself still stood on guard, the captain and mate with the wounded engineer being behind us. We smote hard whenever a chance offered ; but recognising the hopelessness of our position, my interest

in the affair began to wane. Perhaps I was tired, perhaps I had lost more blood than was good for me ; at all events, I was gradually losing all zest in the affair, and once or twice I found myself striking aimlessly, with no particular intention to hurt.

This frightened me. I knew what was coming, and forthwith braced myself for a last effort. I was just on the point of turning to the captain to tell him that he must prepare for a final rush, when I beheld the runaway Craigiemore emerge from the forward companion. In his hand he held the big brass nozzle of our fire-hose, and as I looked I saw him haul several lengths of hose up on deck. My heart gave a quick beat, and I turned giddy with wonder.

As soon as he was observed, about five or six of the pirates rushed towards him with a yell. He saw them coming and his head flew into the companion-way. Then came his big voice in its broadest Scotch, "Noo !"

Immediately facing about, he pointed the hose fair at the rascals. They fell back, expecting they knew not what. A few moments

of intense anxiety followed. Every eye was turned upon the redoubtable Scot who stood there, a grim smile on his grimy face, holding in check those desperate ruffians by the sheer power of moral force.

Then Li Chee, who as usual was the first to recover his senses, shouted out something in his shrillest and most authoritative tones, and the men forward at once made a move on Craigiemore. But their former irresolution proved to be his salvation. Before they had advanced a couple of paces I saw the hose shake violently : the next moment the wind came hissing through the nozzle, and then followed a huge jet of water and steam which thoroughly drenched the miscreants. Immediately the air was filled with the most fearful shrieks imaginable, and the would-be murderers turned and fled aft, as though the devil himself were at their heels. Nor did they stop for a second, once they reached the after-rail, but springing upon it, some took headers into the sea, while others clambered down the ropes into the junks.

The fellows, who up till now had guarded us, seeing the formidable Craigiemore ap-

proach, the streaming hose in his hand, turned like one man and fled ; but not so quickly as to escape entirely the scalding flood. The same mad confusion followed ; the same wild shrieks split the air. Some jumped into the sea as before, others swung themselves down by the ropes. In an incredibly short space of time there was not a single pirate left aboard us.

Craigiemore passed us with a grin.

"It's verra curious," he said, "how much these dirty vermin hate warm water." And so he marched on aft, for he had not done yet.

Leaning over the side I saw that the utmost confusion prevailed aboard the junks, the crews of which seemed even more eager to get away from us than they had been to come. The lashings were slashed, the sails hurriedly hoisted : even long oars were got out to push off from our hateful side. But quick as they were, they could not escape the vengeful Craigiemore with his dreadful hose. Now into one junk he turned it, now into another, till to escape him half the men leaped overboard, while the other half cowered

shrieking under every available piece of cover. So terrible was the confusion, so great the agony they endured, that I was not sorry when the wind at length caught them, and carried them beyond his reach. I did not expect any further danger from that quarter. Craigiemore had put out the fire.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTERWARDS

As soon as Craigiemore saw that there was nothing more to be feared from the enemy, he dropped the hose rather sharply and let its boiling flood pour over the side. As he came towards us he kept chafing his hands, which I saw were boiled as red as a lobster, What he must have suffered while holding that hose no one but himself will ever know.

“Weel, Quenton,” he said—and I could see the proud boyish smile breaking out all over his dirty face—“ye never kenned the power of a hot bath, did ye?”

“You’ve done well, Craigiemore,” said the old man. “I shall not forget the service.”

“Ooch, Captain Castle,” said he, “ye mustna speak of it. Once given the suggestion, it was a verra seemple matter. You must thank the second mate for the suggestion,” he added in a meaning tone.

The captain looked at me. It was a singular thing, but fate seemed to insist upon his being always in my debt.

"I think Mr. Quenton and I understand each other better," he said.

"Indeed, I hope so, sir ; but I am sorry to say that I must disclaim all responsibility for this."

"Oot, man," said Craigiemore, "did you no suggest that I should use the engines or boilers ? Weel, don't ye see, I couldna use the engines, so I just went and made use o' the boilers."

"And good use too," laughed the captain, who, now that all immediate danger was passed, seemed to come round like a vane. "But just now you shouted to some one below ?"

Craigiemore smiled. "Eh, to be sure. An apprentice o' mine, captain ;" and without further explanation he walked forward to the companion and called down it. A moment or two after Mrs. Castle emerged, her white dress smeared with coal and grease, her soft white hands almost as dirty as the engineer's.

Craigiemore did not speak, none of us spoke ; but her husband seized her by both

hands, and looked as he must have looked in the days of his wooing. As he led her away aft her eyes met mine, and something seemed to tell me that she was seeking my approval. If eyes can speak you may be sure she did not seek in vain.

We carried the chief engineer below and put him to bed. He was still unconscious, suffering from a severe blow on the head, and though we had no doctor aboard to give us a correct diagnosis, I knew that the poor little man was in a bad way. However, we did what we could for him, and then set about putting our own house in order; nor was it till we came to examine ourselves that we had any idea of the extent or nature of our injuries. Still, we washed them carefully, and then each in turn anointed the other.

When I again went up on deck I found that the wind from the south-west had freshened considerably, and that the three junks were lying well down on the eastern horizon. It was a pleasant sight, though I knew that their occupants must still be suffering the agonies of the scalded. I prayed that Li Chee might change his ways with his new skin.

Forward, stretched out, lay the third mate, the knife that had brought him down still sticking in his side. He was, of course, quite dead. That we knew before going below; but it was a sad thing to see him lying there, a young man still in his early twenties. I pulled the knife out of him and tossed the hideous thing overboard: then reverently covered him with an old piece of sailcloth. In time he too would follow the knife.

The after deck was in a shocking state of dirt and confusion, while here and there were huddled at least half-a-dozen dead bodies. These I picked up and flung over the side, and then, getting a bucket, well washed the decks. By this time I could scarcely stand, while to keep my eyes open required an effort of which I was no longer capable.

When I awoke the next morning the sun was well up, and though I knew myself to be in full possession of all my faculties, for which I devoutly thanked God, I was so fearfully stiff in every joint that for a time I could not move. But I recollect it was a delicious sort of helplessness, the mild twinges of pain producing a rather agreeable sensa-

tion. What had been done aboard the *Corea* that night I had not the remotest idea, but if a watch had been set I am perfectly certain no one could have kept it.

Relieved somewhat by this thought I began to chafe my nether limbs, and presently had the satisfaction of being able to throw them over the bunk. The rest was comparatively easy, and in a little while I was able to scramble up on deck. Once there, my first thought was to look out for the junks; but they were nowhere to be seen. Indeed there seemed to be no living thing on the water but ourselves. But the wind was blowing very hard, and the sea looked angry and threatening. The old ship swung to and fro with a gentle, easy motion, and as the wind swept through my hair and clothes I felt glad that I was alive, though on board the *Corea*.

I took a few turns up and down aft, but no one appearing, I filled my pipe and strolled forward, sitting just under the bridge. Save for an occasional harsh shriek of the wind, and the low drowsy hum of breaking seas, it was strangely lonesome sitting there with my thoughts. No throb of the engines, which

had kept me company for so many long hours ; no sight or sound of anything human : a deserted ship and the great melancholy waters all around. The bridge looked but the skeleton of a real bridge : even the great anchors forward had a lonesome, desolate look about them which no self-respecting anchors should have. The funnel, never a thing of beauty, had become encrusted with salt, which gave it that uncared-for, plaintive look which is the despair of a tidy officer.

Heigho ! ' I sighed consumedly as I pulled away at my old bull-dog. I watched the wind catch the blue smoke and whirl it overboard. I saw some quaint shapes in the smoke, some interesting ones too : white faces and strange dark eyes.

Poof ! Surely I suffered yet from that vicious blow on the head. How else was I to account for such foolish dreaming ? What had I to do with white faces and strange dark eyes ? I was only the second mate aboard the *Corea*, and she was little better than a derelict.

I looked up, angry with myself, and there

stood the excellent Ji Ji, a steaming cup of coffee in his hand, a smile on his amiable face.

“Mas’r better ?” he inquired.

“Quite, thank you, Ji. And you ?”

He tossed his head disdainfully at the mere absurdity of the question.

“Ji always too muchee well.”

“A good failing, Ji : see that you cultivate it.”

At that moment Craigiemore dragged himself round the corner and came towards us.

“Hollo — cawfee !” he cried. “Just run awa’, laddie, and fetch me a wee drap.”

Ji smiled and went forward : Craigiemore came and sat beside me. His face, which could not have had less than a dozen cuts on it, looked picturesquely sad and ugly in the early day, for where it had no sticking-plaister it was smeared with ointment. Under such conditions it is scarcely necessary to say that he looked anything but well, though when I mentioned that self-evident fact he grew exceedingly irritable.

“Well, Quenton, I can’t say that you look

much of a beauty yourself," he answered sourly. "You've something down that left cheek of yours that will take the conceit out of you for many a day to come."

"You misunderstand me, you battered bagpipe. I wasn't thinking of your beauty, which was always a myth, but your health, you Sawney."

"Ah, weel noo," said he, relapsing into his native dialect, "why did ye no mention it afore? Dinna ye ken, Quenton, that I'm in no sae muckle bad way? But ye look terrible pale, man, and nane sa sprightie as I've seen ye."

"I shan't cry, Craigiemoire, but I may go precious near it."

"Oot, man, an' ye cry I'll wallop the life oot o' ye—if I dinna cry too muckle mysel'. But here comes that hideous heathen wi' the cawfee. Ji, ye dour son o' the fag-end o' a yellow fever, do ye ken me ain bonnie Scotland?"

Ji, who had handed him the coffee, looked down into the engineer's battered face and smiled his idiotic yellow smile.

"No sabbee."

“Do ye ken the Bruce?”

“No sabbee,” said Ji.

“Nor the Wallace, ye pig-eyed blastie?”

“No sabbee,” said Ji.

“Then, man, do ye ken the Battle o’ Bannockburn?”

“No sabbee,” murmured the imperturbable chow.

The Scot was at his wits’ end. He took a long gulp at the coffee: then his eye brightened.

“Perhaps, ye saffron-faced cuckoo, ye ken one Rabbie Bur-rns?”

Ji smiled sweetly.

“No sabbee Labbie Bul-luns.”

Craigiemore dropped his head with a sigh. His patriotism had received a rude shock. That there lived a man, even a heathen, who did not know all about Scotland and the Battle of Bannockburn was nothing less than a calamity.

Though I was in no mood for joking, I couldn’t help completing Craigiemore’s confusion.

“Ji, you sabbee England?”

“Plenty sabbee England,” said the yellow

man. "England welly gleet countly : plenty soldier man, plenty ship. Queen Wictolia plenty lich."

"Oot, ye yellow baboon," cried the engineer, "dinna ye ken that we crushed England at the Battle o' Bannockburn ?"

Ji smiled softly and amiably.

"No sabbee clush," he said.

I laughed outright as Ji walked away, while Craigiemore began moodily to fill his pipe. Then presently he looked up at me and smiled, or smiled as much as his stiff face would allow.

"Quenton, they say it takes a Scot a long time to see a joke ; but he's nae sa hopeless if he gets there in the end."

It was a glorious day, and though I felt delightfully sore after my late buffetings, I thought it was some recompense to sit there smoking in the sun. The breeze was extremely invigorating, and the sunshine seemed to filter through my clothes right into my body. I don't think I really knew how sweet tobacco was till then.

After some moments of exquisite dreaming I turned once more to the second engineer,

who was busy picking the skin off his scalded fingers.

“By the way, how is Campbell?”

Craigiemore shook his head.

“Campbell’s nae sae well that I’d care to change places wi’ him. His nut was crackit terrible bad.”

“Serious, eh?”

“Weel now,” he murmured slowly, but pointedly, “wad ye think it seerious if your own nut was crackit?”

“Oh, but it takes such a lot to crack a Scotchman’s skull.”

“Nae doot it’s nae so soft as an Englishman’s, but it’s nae sae hard as a cannon ball neither. Campbell’s in a bad way. Deleerium, I’m thinkin’. It was an awfu’ hard blow, Quenton, and Campbell’s brain, after twenty years o’ hard drinkin’, is not as firm as it was. Now, had it been you or me——”

“At any rate, I can answer for you.”

Craigiemore laughed loudly as he answered, “Ay, that ye can, laddie, that ye can, nae doot.” He was like a great boy who has been given a holiday, and who, unconsciously, is glad that he is alive. To hear him air his

feeble wit, and mark his odd vanity, one would scarcely imagine that he was the Craigiemore of such courage and resource.

Later on, when the captain appeared on deck, I made my way aft, for I had not forgotten his wife's promise that I would go below again when all danger was over. He sat in his long chair, his wife by his side. She, I thought, looked extremely pale and fatigued; but he seemed to have recovered himself in a wonderful manner. His face looked clearer and more cheerful: his moustache had something of its early curl.

He looked up eagerly as I advanced, and interrogated me with a smile.

"I want to know, sir, if it is your wish that I should still consider myself under arrest?"

He stroked his moustache affectionately, and after hesitating a few moments graciously replied, "No, I don't think so. I must admit you have won your liberty."

"Thank you, sir."

"By the way, what has become of the *débris*?"

I pointed overboard. He smiled.

"By George, it was a tight corner. But how is Campbell?"

I told him all I had learned from Craigie-more.

"Poor little Campbell!" he muttered. "I must go and see how the little beggar's coming along."

With that he got up and set out for the chief engineer's room, while I was left face to face with his wife. I don't know why, but when I looked into her eyes I felt as though I had neither tongue nor intellect. It appeared to me that she too was embarrassed, though why she should be I could not fathom.

"You are ill?" I said, blurting it out in my blunt, savage way. The fact is, I was never quite myself when under the immediate influence of this woman. I think she sympathised with me. At any rate she never resented my rudeness.

"What makes you think so?"

"You look it."

"Thank you."

I could have bitten out my stupid tongue. Seeing my confusion she smiled.

"If I were, would that surprise you?"

“No : but I hope it may not be.”

She sighed and looked out over the sea. She had a strange habit of staring away out into the horizon as though she saw there something more than sky and water.

“It would not matter much.”

“What would not ?”

Her eyes met mine, and I thought they were full of tears.

“If I were to—die.”

“It would matter a great deal to some people.”

“No, you are quite wrong. It would matter to nobody.”

I did not like to hear her talk in this miserable manner. A young woman, with her whole life before her, to talk about dying, was not to be tolerated—she who had passed successfully through so much, who had proved herself so worthy to live.

“There is nothing before me but a long life of labour, of labour too which is not entirely without its hardship and danger, and yet I have no wish to die.”

“Nor I, Mr. Quenton. It is but an outburst of petty dissatisfaction. I know you

think me ungrateful ; perhaps I am. Sometimes I think I show gratitude enough for what I get ; perhaps you think I don't. Perhaps, too, you don't understand."

Did I ? Sometimes I thought so ; occasionally I censured myself freely for the thought. Certain I was that her marriage with Captain Castle was a hideous mistake. Unfortunate in her choice, she had been doubly unfortunate in seeing that choice under the most disadvantageous of circumstances. If she were a woman of spirit, as I fully believed, how could she be other than shocked and humiliated ? It was most distressing to see her thus cast down, she who had faced the dangers with a cooler head and a calmer pulse than any among us. It seemed as though action and danger were as the breath of life to her. When she sat down to think, she was a wretched woman.

Well, I could do nothing even if I would. After all, she had married Castle with her eyes open, and if he had turned out other than she expected, perhaps under different circumstances he might have shown to more advantage. It is no easy matter to be genial

in adversity. At least, such is the way I argued with myself. But then I was not a woman and bound to him. If I had been, I wonder what I would have done?

That night, or rather early the next morning, Campbell the chief engineer died. The blow he received had given him concussion of the brain, and it might be said that he never regained consciousness. Craigiemore made his shroud, and then he and I bore him up on deck. We held no funeral service of any description, as there was not such a thing as a prayer-book on board; but as we tipped him over the side, Craigiemore said in a loud solemn voice, "God be wi' ye, Campbell," to which I responded, "Amen."

Then just as the sun shot up out of the east the body of the engineer sank beneath the waves.

CHAPTER XV

A NEW TERROR

RED and angry rose the sun, shot with ugly black bars of cloud, and shortly after his appearance the monsoon began to blow. A fair fresh breeze at first, it gradually increased in vehemence, till about noon we got it in full force. The sea rose roughly as if at a preconcerted signal, and the helpless old vessel once more began to pitch and toss. Long black streamers of clouds angrily tore themselves in strips across the sky, while squall upon squall of rain came rushing along, transforming the face of the heavens and beating the ugly green sea into a still uglier green. The sun peeped in and out at odd intervals, sometimes with a sickly yellow smile, at others with a hard black look of fury. The sea, now driven white with anger, flung itself savagely against us till we reeled beneath the impetus

of the shock. Nor did the night bring any cessation of the fury of this attack ; but all through the drear black hours the thump, thump, thump of the seas went on, the shrieking of the wind, and the groaning of the ship.

For seven full days and nights we knew not a moment's respite. How we managed to get through the time would be difficult to say. Ji Ji was advanced to the post of cook, and I may add that I did not fare badly in consequence, though our meals partook more of the nature of a scramble than anything else. Craigiemore and the third engineer, forsaking their beloved machinery, were enrolled as deck officers, and throughout those long days and nights kept watch with me, the chief mate rarely honouring the bridge. Occasionally the captain poked his nose up for a few minutes ; but this was only on rare occasions, when the atmosphere below almost stifled him. Then I knew by his watery eyes and the uncertain quivering of his protruding under lip that he had been at the bottle again. Well, I hardly blamed him. Sometimes, when the outlook appeared its blackest, I felt as though I would like to join him. After all,

there was warmth and comfort, and a delicious sort of oblivion in drink. For a man who no longer considered appearances, the bottle was a glorious friend.

Of the captain's wife I saw next to nothing. Indeed I did not see her at all for something like four days. Then she crept up to the lee side of the deck-house, and for a while held on to the rail; but the weather was too stormy, the rain too incessant to prolong the gloomy view.

I escorted her back to the door, and I thought she looked absolutely like a dying woman. Her face was distressingly pale, which the dark blue under her eyes seemed to accentuate: her eyes themselves had a bright uncanny glare in them which was positively painful to witness.

"You are ill?" I said.

"Oh no."

I believe she would have said, "Oh no," had she been on her death-bed. Had she complained more she might have been more of a woman and thus gained more consolation, though I doubt if she would have gained such consolation as was now awarded her. Still, I

wanted no admission of illness. The truth was written upon her face with horrible distinctness.

“Mr. Quenton,” she said, “do you believe our troubles will ever end?”

My own impression was that troubles never end this side of the grave, and, if the Scriptures be true, not always then; but I told her in my philosophical way that what we call trouble is a mere myth, that the thing does not exist, or if it does it is but a morbid sort of vanity. Some people find their only pleasure in imagination, which, taking a melancholy turn, renders its possessor ecstatic.

She smiled. Had I been her husband she probably would have called me a fool.

“I know you better than you imagine,” she said. “Why do you always try to be somebody else?”

“Perhaps there is a reason for that too.”

“Tell me.”

Not feeling much at home I tried to hide my confusion in a smile; but I was already conscious of a pair of dark, eager eyes which seemed to penetrate to my inmost thoughts. How could I tell her?

"I dare not. You would think me vainer than I am."

"Well then," she admitted, a sad little smile playing nervously round the corners of her mouth, "there is no such thing as trouble, and the *Corea* is the easiest and most luxurious ship that ever sailed the seas."

"I wouldn't contradict you for the world."

For seven days, as I have said, the gale blew with great fury, but on the morning of the eighth it abated somewhat, and we were able to get about on deck without the constant fear of being washed overboard. So far we had passed fairly well through the ordeal, though towards the end of it the third engineer began to complain of certain inward pains, coupled with a most feverish burning of the body. I did not like the look of him myself, the fact that his wounds had not properly healed being in my opinion an extremely bad sign. However, no one seemed to think the case a serious one, and I tried to think with the others. But when one morning the poor fellow was too ill to get up, I admit to much uneasy imagining.

"What's the matter wi' ye, Alick?" said Craigiemore, who came in just as I was giving

the poor chap a little bit of something to eat.

“Ye’re no so awfu’ sick, man?”

“Nay, Jamie,” said the man, “I’m nae sick at a’. Just a wee bit knockit oot, ye ken!”

“Oot!” repeated Craigiemore; “what hae ye been doin’, man, that ye should be knockit oot?”

“Naething, Jamie. It’s just the burnin’ sores that willna mend.”

“Pish, Alick, man,” said the second engineer, “what’s a sore?”

“It’s nae the sore, don’t ye ken: it’s just the mendin’ what troubles me. Ye ken, Jamie, I’m no complainin’, man; but I’m no so muckle fond o’ me bed as some o’ ye may think.”

It was a brave struggle; but the pathos and pain in the wide brown eyes could not be hidden.

“Nay, nay, laddie,” said the engineer softly, “I ken a’ aboot it. Gang to sleep an ye can. Verra soon, I’m thinkin’, we shall a’ be safely at anchor.”

I thought so too, though he might have added, with all steam shut off.

I went below to report the case to the

captain, who questioned me very closely, not so much, I think, through compassion for the sick man, as to learn definitely if the symptoms were those of fever. I feared they were, and told him so, though I could not tell its name.

“Tell him how sorry I am,” said the old man, “and that I hope he’ll soon pull round.”

His wife, who was in the saloon at the time, followed me up on deck to put a few more questions. Did I really think the third engineer was seriously ill? I replied, undoubtedly. He had been really ill for some days without complaining : now he could no longer hide the fact. She listened to me very attentively : then thanked me and went below.

The first thing I did after I had finished my watch on deck was to descend to the sick man’s cabin, and there, to my great surprise, and, I may add, delight, I discovered Mrs. Castle. She was sitting near the foot of the bunk, a book in her hand from which she was reading aloud. The man’s hot eyes were fixed intently upon her cool white face ; his lips were parted in a happy smile. The book was glorious “Westward Ho,” the chapter that

which describes the fight between the English mastiffs and the Spanish bloodhounds.

"Ay," murmured the sick man, "but they were braw laddies, they were braw laddies."

Then my shadow fell athwart the door and the reading ceased. The sick man favoured me with a reproachful look.

"Pray go on," I said, for I had heard some of the tones of that voice, and wished to hear more.

She looked at me and smiled. Then turning to the engineer, said, "I must not tire you, Mr. Cameron."

"Nay, nay, ye canna tire me," he protested. "It's a heavenly fight, ye ken, and your voice is just like sweet music. I wadna miss the end o' this for twa bawbees."

If she had hesitated for a moment she could not possibly hesitate any longer. What greater compliment could the engineer have paid to her skill in reading, or the interest of the story? So on she read to the glorious finish, and the magnetic thrill in her voice set me throbbing from head to foot. As for the invalid, he grew so fearfully excited that in my heart I censured her choice of subject,

though I could have stood there in the doorway and listened to her for ever.

When she was gone I put a few hurried questions to the sick man, and learned from him how she had come and announced her intention of nursing him. Even as I looked about the poor little cabin I saw many traces of her presence. The place, though bare, had a neat, tidy appearance which was quite foreign to it, while round the port and over the doorway she had hung some kind of soft muslin curtains. Indeed the poor fellow confessed that when he opened his heavy eyes and saw her moving about the room, a white sweet creature in a soft white dress, he indulged in some extremely fanciful reflections.

But notwithstanding her almost unexampled attention to her self-imposed duty, the patient sank rapidly, so rapidly that his death came like a shock.

It was during the middle watch, which I still continued to keep. The captain was fast asleep below, every one was snoring soundly—every one but the captain's wife and the dying man. Every few minutes, after taking a good look round, I bobbed down to see how the

patient was progressing. He had been in a fierce delirium for several hours, but it had worn itself out and he now lay dying.

As I stood in the doorway I looked the question—How is he? She shook her head sadly. I was shocked to see how ill she looked.

“Go to bed,” I whispered. “At any rate, go and lie down. You look fagged to death. If he takes a turn for the worse I will call you.”

“No, I would rather stay.”

“You will let me stay with you?”

“If you like.”

It was not a long watch after all. About an hour before daybreak the sick man moved. Then, with his eyes glued to the deck above him, he began to mutter softly to himself. Leaning close over him I distinctly heard him whisper, “Doon by the burnie, lass, doon there by the burnie.” Poor fellow, he was home again in far-off Scotland, perhaps a boy playing with his sister in the fields: perhaps a lover walking with his lass. Whatever it was, he smiled, and I knew he was happy.

Well, we gave him as decent a burial as we

had given his chief, but neither the captain nor the mate attended the ceremony, nor would they in any way approach the dead man for fear of infection. Indeed, so fearful was the former of contracting the disease, that he would not allow his wife to come near him till she had thrown all her nursing clothes overboard, and in various other ways freed herself of contagion. As for Craigiemore and me, we were regarded as men already infected and warned to keep our distance. Nor would the old man even allow me to pass to windward of him, while the mate, taking his tone from the master, bore himself with the affectation of an idiot.

As yet I was not certain that the illness from which Cameron had died was contagious. Sometimes I thought it was cholera, or a sort of enteric fever. But I could not absolutely know, though I heard that he had shown some symptoms of it. Certain it is that I suffered much anxiety during the next forty hours or so. Then came that which I feverishly expected, yet dreaded so much to hear.

The mate, who notwithstanding his excessive drinking was gradually losing colour and

flesh, approached me with a look of blank dismay on his ugly face.

"My God, Quenton," he began, "this is a nice go!"

"What is?" I asked, anxious and yet afraid to hear.

"The captain's wife is laid up, and the old man's afraid to go near her."

"Afraid!"

"Well, you see, she's picked up that complaint that killed the engineer. I believe it's cholera, and so does the old man, and it's beastly catching. She was told not to go forward, but you might as well shout to the wind as tell a woman not to do anything. The devil take it, we have had nothing but trouble since she came aboard."

I could not argue with a man who took this view of the situation. Moreover, I felt too full of anxiety to argue. It was hard that she should suffer thus for her goodness; but hardest of all was the thought that her husband dared not approach her.

"Some one must attend to her," I said. "She cannot be allowed to lie there and die."

"Well," he replied, "if you're willing to

risk it you're welcome to the office. But you must carry her forward and keep there."

"Are those the captain's orders?"

"The suggestion was mine: the old man thought it a good one. But, Quenton, much as we have misunderstood each other, I must warn you of the danger."

"Thanks. I must risk it."

The thought came to me that I would make a hospital of my room, and though eager as I was to see her, I first went there and made things as shipshape and comfortable as I could.

Near the after companion I met the captain. He had a cigar in his mouth, and at the first glance appeared to be his usual self; but a closer scrutiny disclosed the fact that he had changed much during the last three weeks. The flesh about his face had sunken into dark, ominous-looking wrinkles: his eyes appeared to have sunk back a quarter of an inch. When he addressed me he hesitated like a man who scarcely knows what he is saying.

"You have spoken to the mate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then recollect—I will allow no communi-

cation between the fore and after parts of the ship."

I dared not speak, even though my indignation tried its hardest to choke me. Truly Captain Castle was a man of great surprises.

"But, sir, the lady is your wife."

"Yes, I know. That's why I wish to avoid her. She'd give it to me for spite."

I bit my tongue and went below without another word, though I admit I felt ashamed of my silence. Yet what sense is there in dashing one's head against a stone wall?

She was in her room, lying on the settee beneath the port, her white face pressed hard on the crimson velvet of the cushion. She wore a loose cream dressing-gown, a soft sweet thing, a mass of ribbons and laces.

I think she must have been asleep when I entered, for she never so much as raised an eyelid to let me know that she was aware of my presence. So I stood quite still watching her sweet face and waiting for her to wake. Fancy being afraid to come near her! But no, it was no use thinking. Fancy utterly failed to comprehend the soul of Captain Castle.

At last her eyes opened, and when she saw

me a faint flush stole into her white face. I held out my hand and she pressed it kindly.

"I am so glad you have come," she whispered. "I was afraid everybody had deserted me."

"How could you think so?"

"They told me I had the plague: that I was a source of danger to everybody on board. If I only had had the strength to get up on deck I would have thrown myself into the sea."

"Hush! you do not know what you are saying. How long have you been like this?"

"Longer than anybody knows. I believe I am even worse now than I was before I went to sleep. But it's so good of you to come. I wanted to see you before—before I went."

She seemed to wring every fibre of my being. My brain whirled, my blood ran hot and cold in sickening rushes.

"For God's sake, hush!" I whispered. "There is nothing to fear. You are fatigued—exhausted. A little rest, and you will be quite well again. This cabin is close, oppressive."

"It is horrible!" she murmured. "It is full of *him*."

I winced, though I ought to have had no cause.

"If I could only prevail upon you to make use of mine."

"But you?"

"Oh, there are plenty of empty cabins now."

"Yes," she said, "isn't it awful!" Then she added under her breath, "There will soon be another one."

This I pretended not to hear. Much as I liked her, I could not indulge her in such deplorable sentiments.

"I have only one wish now," she said; "that I may die soon."

"Why should you wish that?"

"Think of the trouble I shall be if I have a lingering illness."

"You are cruel."

She opened wide her eyes.

"Would you be sorry—you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you have been my good friend, and—and because I want you to live."

She was too weak to stand, so I had to carry her. As I emerged from the companion

way I saw the captain and the mate lounging over against the weather rail. The former, feeling, no doubt, a momentary throb of compunction, moved as though to advance, but the mate held him back. I passed on with my precious charge.

CHAPTER XVI

TWO BELLS

SHE brightened up wonderfully when she found herself in my cabin, declaring that she could breathe at last. I didn't ask her what she meant, but I was delighted to welcome the sweet change in her. Then, after I had made her a cup of beef essence, she talked to me for a good hour, now as bright as the sunshine on the sea outside, and now as serious as the grave she believed she was about to enter. During this time I learned much of her personal history, for she seemed exceedingly eager to make all clear to me. By what I gathered she must have had rather a hard time.

Born in Sydney, where her father at one time had been a well-to-do merchant, she had eventually migrated with an uncle to Manilla, where she experienced many singular

reverses of fortune. From Manilla she found her way to Hong-Kong, and when she first met Captain Castle she was companion in the house of one of the owners of the *Corea*. The Captain plied his suit assiduously, and each time he came back from a voyage he seemed to be but the more enamoured. Persistence won as it invariably does. She liked him well enough to place her life in his charge. Then there were many other considerations, which I understood well enough. Of her husband's true nature she had no inkling till she stepped aboard his ship.

I listened to her recital, told as it was in broken murmurs, with some very curious sensations running through me. What a shock to her must have been the discovery of her husband's real character ! And yet I could not help thinking that she had been especially unfortunate in coming on this particular voyage. That Captain Castle had always been considered a violent man I knew from certain things I heard aboard ; but those who knew him best, never having seen him under such trying conditions, guessed not what he could be. Perhaps in the ordinary

way he would have passed muster. Given certain conditions, one must not expect too much. I admit I had no idea what manner of man he really was, and in my own modest way I rather prided myself on my powers of observation ; therefore, making all due allowances, I could not blame her at all. My own opinion is, that the captain's behaviour surprised no one more than the captain himself. Yet what good ever came out of a whisky bottle ?

Our position was now an extremely delicate one, but, considering all things, I think she felt it but little. She liked me, and trusted me, and her face lit up whenever I entered the cabin. Of her husband she never spoke, his last act of cowardice having severed every bond of sympathy between them.

But it would be profitless, perhaps tedious, to narrate at length the course of her illness. I feared how it would end ; and one morning, just after four o'clock, as I descended from my watch on deck, I saw that the end was not far off.

She greeted me with a glad smile and a warm pressure of the hand.

“I’m so glad you’ve come. Your watch is over?”

“Yes.”

“Mine will be over soon.”

Again I pretended not to understand her, a course I invariably adopted whenever she indulged in these gloomy insinuations.

“You look better,” I said, attempting to infuse a little cheeriness into the remark. “Tell me, you have slept?”

“Sweetly ; and I am better.”

“Ah, that’s the style. I told you things were not as bad as you thought. Keep this up and we shall have you on deck in a few days now.” It was an effort, but I’ll swear I looked pleased, though I was never so near crying in my life.

“In less than a few days,” she said.

Again I tried the blank look of misunderstanding ; but oh the misery of it ! In the dull lamplight her poor face looked already dead : but her eyes shone marvellously. She was all eyes.

I fooled about trying to mix her a draught, for I had taken over the medicine chest, and with the aid of a doctor’s book had managed

to mix various compounds ; but there was such a devil of a mist in the cabin that I could scarcely see.

A long silence followed, for she had sunk back on the pillow with closed eyes and seemed to sleep. I sat gazing at her, scarcely daring to breathe. It was the most awesome watch that I had ever kept.

After a long time she moved : her eyes opened and rested on me.

“ Dick,” she whispered.

“ Yes : I am here.”

It seemed quite natural that she should call me by my Christian name, though until then I was not aware that she knew it.

She smiled sadly, almost imploringly.

“ I have always called you Dick—to myself. You are not angry ? ”

“ How could you think so ? ”

“ Because I have no right to call you Dick ; but you didn’t know, did you ? ”

“ I wish I had known.”

“ Then you will be sorry when—when—” I think she must have seen the agony in my face, for she added quickly, “ You have been very good to me. I shall never be able to

repay you—but—but—” The tears welled up in her eyes and she stopped, gasping.

“You distress yourself—and me.”

For a full minute or two she was silent : then when she looked again at me her face bore the softest, most delicious flush imaginable.

“Dick,” she whispered again.

“Yes.”

“When I am gone, and there can no longer be any harm in the act, will you—will you just kiss me once?”

“My dear!”

“Ah!”

For a moment the woman in her conquered all else. She drew my face down to her breast. Just then the man on deck struck two bells.

“What’s that?”

“Two bells.”

“That means five o’clock?”

“Yes.”

“You will remember two bells?”

“Always.”

.

Some two hours later I went aft to tell the captain that his wife was dead. He was

asleep, but to my persistent knocking at last awoke and inquired surlily, "Who's there?"

"I—Quenton."

"What do you want?" he roared. "Didn't I tell you to keep forward?"

"Yes, sir; but I thought I ought to tell you that——"

"Curse you, go away!" he snarled. "Don't tell me anything. You breathe contagion, I tell you. I'll have nothing to do with you."

"But, sir, your wife——"

"What! Hasn't she gone yet?"

"She died two hours ago."

"Good God!"

I knew by the tone of his voice that he was deeply affected, but whether it was terror at the thought of the new death that had come aboard us, or sorrow at her loss, I would not like to say.

As I was turning away, his voice reached me.

"Quenton!"

"Sir."

"See that everything is done decently—and quickly."

"Yes. You would not like to see her?"

“No, no ! I’m awfully sorry, but it wouldn’t be safe.”

I nearly let out something, but with difficulty managed to suck it in between my teeth. At any rate, she wouldn’t know.

Craigiemore and I did all that was necessary. Neither fevers nor plagues held any terrors for him.

“It’s just this,” he used to say in the blunt way of his class, “there’s nae doot aboot it—we’re a’ doomed : but I just ken that God’s as much wi’ us as He is wi’ the angels yonder.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE END OF THE VOYAGE

IT was like fate that the next person to be seized by the new terror should be the mate. Despite the utmost precaution, and unlimited quantities of whisky, the thing had seized him and struck him down. When the captain heard of it he raved and foamed like one demented, and, in his eagerness to ward off infection, went and got villainously drunk. He had but one cure for every ailment—whisky ; and now that necessity had prescribed that particular fluid he took it to excess. Nor was he mean with it once he fully recognised the dire straits into which we had fallen ; but neither Craigiemore nor I was to be tempted, notwithstanding a decided partiality for a tot now and again. Sometimes we mixed a little with our quinine, of which drug I found a goodly quantity in the

medicine chest ; but otherwise we would have none of it.

Though, to be candid, to hear of the mate's death would not have rendered me absolutely inconsolable, I could not let him die without such assistance or comfort as it was possible for me to give. But when I approached him he shrieked at me to go away, and then began to jabber about irons, mutineers, and many other things, all bearing on our past experiences. I offered him some of our quinine mixture ; but he no sooner tasted it than he flung it at me, declaring I wanted to poison him. I was sorry, of course, but I did not love him well enough to care for his company under such conditions.

As I emerged into the saloon from the cabin I encountered the captain, and I saw in a moment that he had been stricken with the disease.

"Keep off," he roared. "By Heaven, I'll kill you if you don't keep off!"

"You distress yourself unnecessarily."

"What do you mean?" he thundered. "Back, keep back!" But it was he who continued to advance, not I.

"Need you ask what I mean?"

Ashen as was his face it instantly grew more like death. The fright alone almost killed him.

"Do you mean—" He could not utter the awful thought, but let it die in a sort of gurgle between his lips.

"Precisely. The Terror has fastened on you."

He threw up his arms with an awful shriek.

"It's a lie, an infernal lie!" he roared. "You are only saying that to frighten me. You know it's not true, Quenton," he added imploringly; "my God, you know it's not true!" And all the time his pallid fingers crawled nervously over his pallid face.

"Perhaps not: at any rate let us hope not."

"I see what it is," he went on; "this is your revenge, this is your way of paying me out. But if you think I'm going like the others, you make a great mistake. It's a lie to say that I've got the Terror; it's a lie to say that I'm going. I haven't got it, and I won't go; by God, I won't!"

I tried to pacify him, but it was useless.

"I know your game, you whining hound," he cried furiously, advancing upon me in a most threatening manner. "You think if I go, that

you'll escape my charge of insubordination ; but I won't go. By God, I'll live to spite you."

"I sincerely trust that you may live for a nobler purpose."

"Oh yes, I know you, you canting hypocrite : I tell you, I know you. Whine and snuffle as much as you please, but you won't take me in. You know very well that the Terror has not got hold of me. Curse you for a mischief-maker ! I tell you, you know the Terror has not got hold of me."

He made a vicious blow at my head, which, however, I easily avoided. The man was quite mad with drink and fear. As I retreated he continued to advance.

"I have an account to settle with you," he hissed, "an account of long standing. Ever since you have been aboard this ship you have seized every opportunity to defy my authority, or to make me look ridiculous. Well, I'm going to have a settlement with you now, you soor ; I'm going to pay you back with compound interest."

Advancing stealthily as he spoke he drew a big sheath-knife from his belt and menaced me with it. I retreated almost imperceptibly

till my back touched the far end of the saloon. I could go no farther that way. A devilish smile lit his face : his eyes shone madly. I knew that in a moment now he would spring. Of Captain Castle I had no particular fear, but of the madman and his terrible knife I experienced a wholesome dread. His big moustache bristled up like the whiskers of a cat ; he showed his teeth in a way that made me shiver. He would spring presently. I knew it. "I could see the devil dancing in his bloodshot eyes.

There was very little time for thought, and I doubt if what happened was as much the outcome of thought as of instinct. But just when the madman was about to spring I pointed my finger over his right shoulder and shrieked with all my might—

"My God, sir—look!"

The cry of horror that escaped him made me shiver from head to foot. As I think of it, it turns me faint even now. He sprang round like a flash expecting to see—what? Who knows? Who can attempt to fathom his horrid thoughts? In an instant I was on him.

I candidly admit I had no love for the work

and yet I fought with as much zest as though I really enjoyed it. He was a man of good build, and his fury lent him additional strength. For a few moments the tension was so extreme that I thought the muscles of my arms would crack. I knew such a state of things could not last, and even in my despair I wondered who would give way first.

Fortunately, when I sprang, I had slipped my arm over his shoulder and seized him by the right wrist, which, as he held the knife in his right hand, for the moment paralysed his action ; but quick as thought he swung round, shifting the knife from one hand to the other. It flashed before my eyes, and I felt it rip the breast of my coat ; but it did me no real injury. Being a right-handed man, he was unable to use his left with equal dexterity. Then I closed with him.

In the narrow space between the table and the cabins we rolled together, he making futile efforts to stab me, I clinging to his wrist with desperate energy. He foamed at the mouth like a mad dog ; his cries of rage and terror were such as I shall never forget. Sometimes in the night I hear them now, and wake up thinking the fiend has got me by the throat.

I, however, held my breath tight, knowing its value, and concentrating all my energy in one great effort, gradually forced him back across the table. He seemed to guess my intention, and fought with renewed vigour ; but I had him tightly by the throat, and getting him at a proper angle against the table, back he went slowly, slowly, in spite of his mad struggle. I had the purchase on him, and he knew it.

Suddenly a scream of the most intense agony escaped him, and he collapsed like a man of straw. The knife rattled to the floor on the other side of the table : the stiff muscles of the man grew limp. I had nothing beneath me but a man's form, a form void of consciousness or energy. My last desperate effort had in some way injured him internally.

I laid him out on the saloon table and sprinkled his face with cold water ; but it was a long time before he came round, and when he did he seemed to have no recollection of his murderous attack, nor did I plague him with any details. I knew that drink and terror, coupled with the idea that I was his bitter enemy, had suddenly driven him mad, and that in his madness he wished to be

revenged for a thousand imaginary wrongs. All this could in no way have bettered my case, and I speedily saw that he was beyond hope. The Terror had swooped down upon him with tenfold violence, and by five o'clock that afternoon he was black in the face. Curiously enough, the next morning, at two bells, he died. The mate survived him but a few hours.

No one now was left but Craigiemore, Ji Ji, and myself, nor could we help asking who was to be the next. We shut up the saloon—it had too many awful memories—and lived forward. Sometimes Craigiemore and I walked up and down the after deck, but even that went against my inclination. I could not help wondering if by any chance *she* was listening, or if my footfall broke in upon her rest. I was always thinking of her, always seeing her, always dreaming strange dreams. So I kept forward as much as possible, occasionally taking a turn on the bridge, trying to make myself believe that I was keeping watch. Each morning that I awoke I sprang at once to my mirror and searched my features intently, and when I saw no sign of the Terror there, I wondered why he did not

come. With Craigiemore it was the same. Being a bit of a fatalist he knew its coming was but a question of time. As for Ji Ji, that heathen never bothered his head about it. If it came, well and good: if it didn't, it mattered just as much, or as little.

And in this way the days rolled on till I forgot to count. The wind blew and the sea splashed us; the day came and went and the night duly followed. It mattered little now whether it was day or night. Craigiemore grew as gloomy as death, and I little better. Whole days passed in which he used scarcely half-a-dozen words. For hour after hour he would sit jammed forward in the bows, smoking his pipe and staring moodily across the sea. Even when I hailed him he rarely deigned to turn his head. Truly the Terror had not struck him, but I feared that he was possessed of something which might prove even worse. It was curious, but in some way each seemed to typify the awful monotony, and in avoiding each other we to a certain extent made life tolerable. I don't mean that I was absolutely sick of Craigiemore, or that he was sick of me, but I am

sure we got on each other's nerves in the most distressing manner.

No doubt he thought me an exceedingly dreary companion, for I was conscious of speaking little and wearing a face like a London fog. Moreover, if he had a preference for the bows of the ship, I had a decided weakness for the bridge: the hours he spent sullenly staring at the sea, I spent moodily watching him. Ji Ji was the only one who had no fads, nor did he seem to think it strange that the engineer should eat his dinner in the stem, while I ate mine on the bridge. Fortunately for his peace of mind, Ji Ji was not cursed with a very vivid imagination. But I often think now of those strange days, and I can see it all as clearly as though it were happening again before my eyes. The wide expanse of sea, the helpless ship, and in the bows the gaunt figure of the silent engineer. But it is not a pleasant thought, and truth to tell I fear it somewhat.

To narrate in detail the dreadful loneliness of those days, would be but to repeat myself. Suffice it therefore if I say that, as nearly as I can guess, some seventeen or eighteen days after

the death of the captain, a coaster bore down upon us, took us aboard, and the *Corea* in tow, and safely towed her into Samarang, to which port the aforesaid coaster was steering when she sighted us. From there Craigiemore, Ji Ji, and I were sent on to Batavia, thence to Singapore, and so back to Hong-Kong.

I am glad to say that both the engineer and I succeeded in casting our gloom overboard long before we reached the great port of South China, and that our varied experiences have left no permanent effects of an injurious nature; but sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night, and fancy I am again sailing the China Seas in company with Captain Castle.

THE END

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